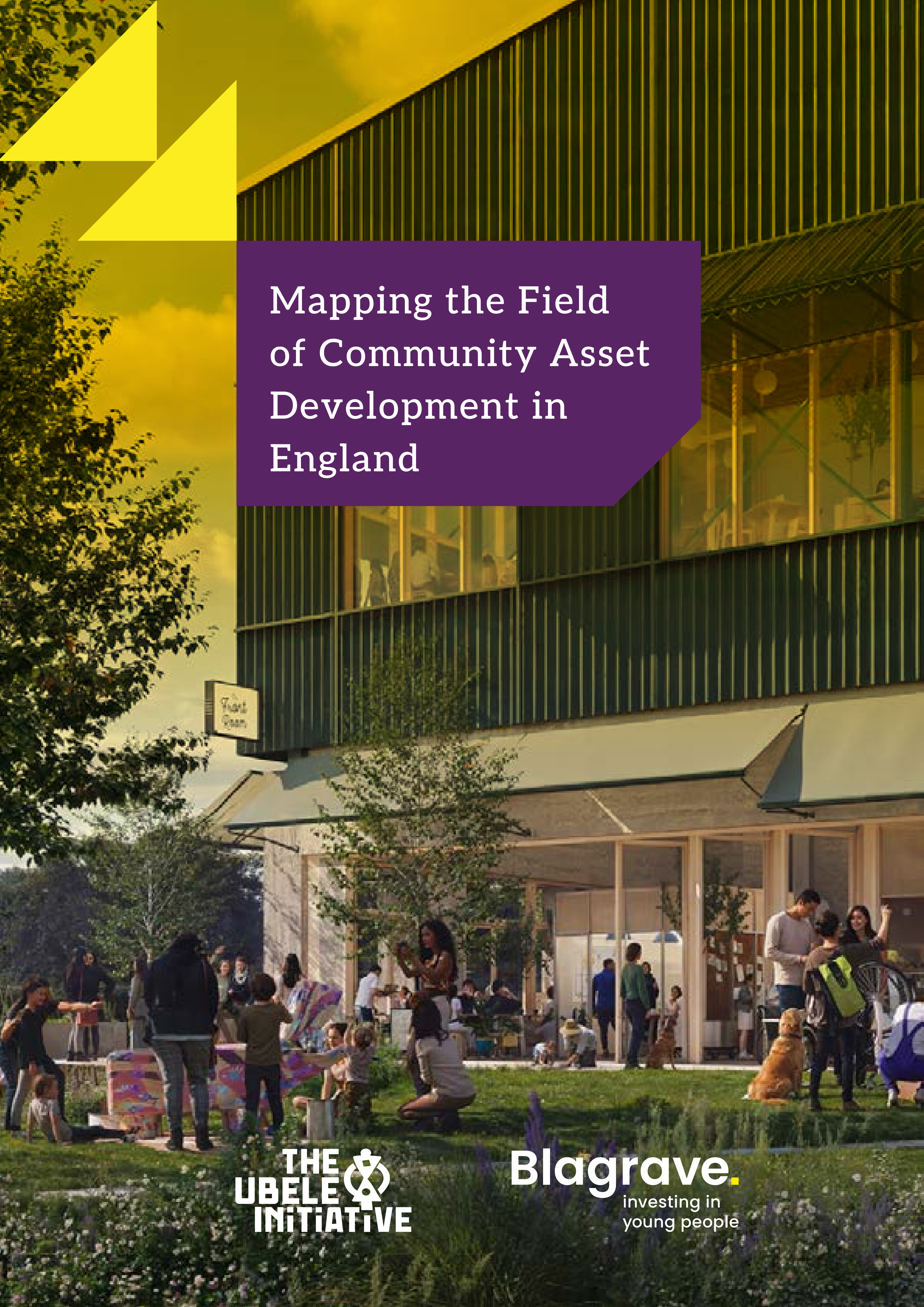
Mapping the Field of Community Asset Development in England



THE UBELE INITIATIVE

Blagrave. investing in young people

Executive Summary

This report shares the data and outputs from a project commissioned by The Blagrave Trust, and delivered by The Ubele Initiative, to build a picture of the infrastructure supporting communities to create, secure and steward assets.

Community assets, the land and buildings stewarded by communities for collective benefit, play a vital role in sustaining the wellbeing, identity and agency of communities. Communities and their assets are coming under threat after over a decade of austerity, the regeneration of urban communities increasingly led by corporate interests, and the increasing challenges of political division. Infrastructure for community asset development will play a vital role in supporting communities to turn the tide and meet the scale of local needs nationally.

→ Read more about this project.

The ecosystem of support for community asset development is diverse. We identified 11 types of infrastructure, from peer networks and pioneering projects to capacity builders and campaigns. Infrastructure involving and supporting young people and marginalised communities is necessary for an inclusive and sustainable field. We found promising examples of infrastructure supporting these audiences, but overall they were limited. Regional variations in infrastructure and variations by asset type were also identified.

→ Read our analysis of the infrastructure landscape.

→ View our infrastructure map.

The journey to communities developing assets can be long and winding. Each stage of the journey comes with its own challenges, often associated with limited funding, lack of consistent support and challenging local and national policy environments.

→ Read our insights into the asset development journey.

Across our work, several core themes and opportunity areas emerged within the field of infrastructure for community asset development. These included:

- Strengthening knowledge infrastructures
- Enabling effective partnerships
- Financing community asset development
- Building a connected ecosystem
- Navigating inconsistent policy landscapes
- Democratic governance and community mobilising practices

→ Read our write-up of the project's emerging themes.

Contents

Foreword

Community assets — the land, buildings and spaces that hold communities together — have been steadily eroded across England. Yet, as this report powerfully shows, there is also extraordinary ingenuity and determination among communities working to reclaim, create and steward these spaces for collective benefit. At The Blagrave Trust, our mission is to work with and for young people to create a more just and equitable society, and this research arrives at a critical moment in our own journey to understand how our asset base and investment approach can better serve that mission.

We commissioned this mapping to build a clearer picture of the infrastructure that enables community asset development, especially for young people and for communities facing structural inequity. The findings are both timely and compelling. They reveal an ecosystem rich with examples of leadership, creativity and solidarity — but also one that is fragmented, under-resourced, and unevenly accessible depending on geography, identity, and asset type. Importantly, the report highlights how young people and marginalised communities remain significantly under-represented in the very infrastructure shaping the future of community ownership.

For Blagrave, this insight could not be more relevant. As political attention gathers around neighbourhood power, youth governance and the expansion of youth hubs, we are committed to ensuring that young people — particularly those facing injustice — can meaningfully shape and lead local change. We believe community assets are a vital part of that future: places where young people build confidence, connection and agency; where communities can organise; and where long-term, place-based change can take root.

This mapping offers a clear pathway for how the funding world can better support that future. It calls for patient, long-term investment; for strengthening knowledge and relational infrastructures; for supporting pre- and post-development capacity; and for ensuring that culturally rooted practices and lived experience are valued alongside technical expertise. Critically, it challenges us to invest not only in projects, but in the ecosystem that will sustain community ownership for generations to come.

We are deeply grateful to research team at The Ubele Initiative for their thoughtful, rigorous and intergenerational approach to this work, and to all the practitioners, organisers and young people who contributed their experience and wisdom. Their insights will help to inform our incoming strategy as we continue exploring how Blagrave can utilise all of the resources we steward to support transformational long term change with young people at the centre.

We hope this report is a helpful resource for funders, practitioners and partners across the field. We want to celebrate the many groups across the country doing remarkable work to protect, sustain and develop community assets. There is real momentum in this space — and we look forward to playing our part in helping it grow.

Eli Manderson Evans, CEO, The Blagrave Trust

About the Project

Community assets and their development

Community assets are the facilities, services and systems that support the wellbeing and functioning of a community. They include everything from community centres to housing, and from youth services to green spaces. Collectively, they enable people to live healthy, purposeful, and socially connected lives.

Community asset development is the process by which communities create, secure, improve, and sustain assets for long-term community benefit. It involves communities taking greater ownership and control over properties and land. The process often combines organisational development as well as physical regeneration of assets.

Community assets function as forms of community agency rather than being merely physical structures. The collective stewardship of assets is as old as humanity and has supported the sustainability of communities for thousands of years[1]. In more recent times, community asset development has often emerged in response to experiences of communities facing social and economic exclusion[2].

In these scenarios, asset development is the reclaiming of spaces for everyday organising, the guardianship of land for the protection of nature and the building housing to provide secure homes. It is a practice that supports the survival and self-determination of communities, and acts as a tool in movements toward community-led, social and environmental justice.

Community assets and their development are coming under threat. The stripping back of public funding[3], relentless regeneration of urban communities[4], and ageing leadership of community organisations[5] have converged to undermine the sustainability of community-led assets. Communities now exist under a challenging financial climate, made worse by over a decade of austerity,

1 Bollier, D. (2014) Think Like a Commoner: A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons
2 Fava, M., & Stott, N. (2019). Challenging racialized institutions: a history of Black and Minority Ethnic housing associations in England between 1948 and 2018
3 IFS (2024) How have English council's funding and spending changed? 2010 to 2024
4 Shaw,.K (2010) UK Urban regeneration policies in the early twenty-first century: Continuity or change?
5 The Ubele Initiative (2023) A Place to Call Home 2.0

Nubian Way Community Housing

the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine and the rising challenges of political division[6].

In response, movements towards building power and resources in communities are gaining momentum[7]. A new generation of leaders are now emerging ready to bring land, property, systems and services into community control. Community asset development is the movement by which this can happen. Meeting the scale of local needs and realising the ambition of communities nationally, however, requires an ecosystem of support. Infrastructure is required to provide the scaffolding to this work and offer the models, motivation and resources that a cohort of multigenerational practitioners will need to make progress.

Project aims

The Ubele Initiative was commissioned by The Blagrave Trust to map the field of community asset development in England. Our focus was on building a better understanding of the infrastructure that exists to support community-led development of physical assets, such as land and buildings. Particular focus was given to infrastructure that supports, involves and is needed for marginalised communities, those that face social and economic barriers to owning and managing community assets, and young people.

The intention for this work was to highlight where further investment is needed in this field and to provide greater perspective on the field for asset development practitioners.

6 Ipsos Mori (2025) 85% of Britons continue to believe that Britain is divided
7 Local Trust (2021) The Community Paradigm: a movement more mainstream than you might think

Methodology

Research for the project was be conducted using a variety of methods, including:

- **Desk based research** - to build an initial mapping of infrastructure organisations and review existing literature in the field.
- **Interviews** - with infrastructure organisations and community asset developers representing different functional roles and perspective in the field (total interviews: 15)
- **Focus group** - with community asset developers across a range of ages, regions of England and demographic backgrounds (total participants: 12)

Our approach to this project sought to centre three core principles:

- **Understanding the landscape at a systems level** – Community asset development is a diverse and interconnected field, encompassing a range of actors and shaped by the relationships between different groups. Alongside making sense of who is active in the field, a fundamental perspective in this work was that community asset development is a complex system with relational dynamics that extend beyond individual organisations.
- **Engaging the field in a generative way** – Our mapping process was intended to be a catalyst for, rather than a snapshot of, the field. We sought to build on what already exists by using our research engagements to share information, create connections and respond to emerging dynamics wherever possible.
- **Working intergenerationally** – The disconnection between older leaders and emerging leaders is a threat to the future sustainability of communities. Working intergenerationally is a core value for The Ubele Initiative and was embodied in this research. The project involved two Young Researchers from underrepresented groups in the field, and delivered an intergenerational focus group, to centre younger perspectives and foster connection across generations.

Notion site

We have created a Notion site version of this report that displays the same learning more interactively. The micro site includes a database of the different actors supporting the field of community asset development in England. This site is an evolving site now managed by the Blagrave Trust.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all of the organisations, asset developers and community groups who contributed their time, insight and experience to this project. Their generosity in sharing knowledge and reflections has shaped this output.

Community organisations and asset developers
We are deeply grateful to the community groups and asset developers who shared their practice with us. This includes The Highlife Centre, Pembroke House and The Walworth Living Room, Sister Midnight, Coffee Afrik, The Beeches, Frontline Self-Build, Unit 38, Nubia Way, West Indian Sports and Social Club, Granby Four Streets, and Hastings Commons.

National and regional infrastructure organisations
We also thank the national and regional organisations that represent infrastructure in this field. Their perspectives helped us to understand the wider ecosystem. This includes Community Land Trusts Network, Co-operatives UK, Locality, Shared Assets, Power to Change, Key Fund, The Social Investment Business, Anthony Collins Solicitors, The Clothworkers' Foundation, Stour Trust and Footwork.

Infrastructure Landscape

Infrastructure for community asset development refers to the ecosystem of support, networks, knowledge and financing that enables communities to create, acquire, control and sustain their own assets. Infrastructure includes everything from peer networks and pioneering projects to capacity builders and campaigns.

A strong infrastructure landscape ensures that communities are able to access the capabilities, capital, and connections required to develop assets successfully. Where marginalised communities have faced historic under-resourcing and experienced systemic exclusion, an effective landscape of infrastructure and support is important in levelling the playing field and giving those groups a fair chance to develop their own assets[8]. Young people also face barriers to participating in the development and stewardship of community assets[9]. The ecosystem of support for community asset development has a key role to play in creating more enabling conditions for young people's involvement and leadership.

This section provides an overview of the landscape of infrastructure supporting community asset development identified over the course of this project. We apply different lenses to the infrastructure landscape to build a picture of what is available, where and to whom.

→ View the full infrastructure map here.

Infrastructure types

The ecosystem of infrastructure supporting community asset development in England is rich and varied. It's made up of a wide variety of organisations and entities playing different functional roles. We've summarised these into eleven typologies described below.

Whilst no typology can perfectly model the field, the categories illustrate the breadth and diversity of the infrastructure landscape.

8 CLES (2021) Community-led development: a roadmap for asset ownership
9 Young People and Community Business (2021) Power to Change

Academics and Thought Leadership

Independent thinkers, research centres and academics develop knowledge and intellectual frameworks to influence the field indirectly through ideas, evidence and interpretation. They help define the field and situate it within wider debates around land, built environment development, economics, the environment and justice. Whilst academic engagement in community asset development is relatively low, research centres and thought leaders beyond academia connect the field to practice on the ground.

→ *Examples: CRESR, CLES, Privatise the Mandem*

Events and Conferences

Gatherings convene the field and create spaces to share knowledge, practice and energy. They are key to building networks, creating connections across disciplines and sparking collaboration across the field. More established infrastructure organisations, such Stir to Action and Co-operatives UK, run annual conferences and festivals. Beyond these annual gatherings, there are a wide variety of ad hoc events delivered by peer networks, asset developers, advocacy groups and more. With infrastructure organisations predominantly based in and around London, there is a challenge that these opportunities for exchanging learning and network building are limited to those with easy access to the capital.

→ *Examples: Stir to Action Festival, Locality Convention, Co-operatives UK National Youth Summit*

Exemplars and Movement Leaders

Exemplars demonstrate what community-led assets can look like in practice and provide models for navigating the realities of the asset development journey. Their achievements inspire prospective community developers and their journeys chart courses for others to follow. Exemplars and movement leaders often also act as mentors or campaigners, directly supporting and advocating for others in the field. Exemplar projects must be recognised as key actors progressing the field. Though, we must be cautious of being over-reliant on a small number of high-profile examples for risk of generalising diverse practice and distracting from the systemic challenges asset developers face more broadly.

→ *Examples: Civic Square, Hastings Commons, Frontline Self-Build*

Funding and Finance

Funding and finance both enable and constrain community asset development projects. Grants, loans and blended capital come from charitable foundations, public funders, and social investment vehicles. Communities also contribute through crowdfunding and community shares. Finance enables communities to buy, develop and sustain assets, but timelines, funding criteria and the cost of finance often do not fit the realities of grassroots work. Pre-development and post-development stages are underfunded[10], and marginalised communities face structural barriers to accessing capital[11]. Funding also plays a role in building and maintaining the ecosystem of support available to asset developers.

→ *Examples: Social Investment Business, Co-operatives UK Community Shares, Joseph Rowntree Foundation*

10 Practical Governance (2019) Protecting Community Asset Inquiry

11 Commission on Social Investment (2021) Reclaiming the Future: Reforming social investment for the Next Decade

Legal Support

Legal expertise is critical to progressing asset development projects. From governance models to lease negotiations, community groups rely on advice and support to move forward. Our mapping found some legal practices with specialism in supporting social purpose and community-led organisations around the development of assets, but accessible legal expertise is scarce. Publicly available resources fill some gaps in legal literacy but coverage of relevant topics is patchy, and knowledge of these services by those who need them is limited.

→ *Examples: Anthony Collins Solicitors, Sistren Legal Collective, Community Legal Toolkit, Law Centres Network*

Local Authority and Government Support

Councils and central government shape the environment that community asset development operates within. Supportive authorities act as enablers using policy, funding, direct support to aid communities, whilst others, who lack the capacity or political will, can constrain community-led development. National policy is inconsistent and incoherent. Stop-start funding cycles, a lack of support to be "investment ready", and missed opportunities to use national policy to support locally led development act as barriers to communities, particularly those already marginalised.

→ *Examples: Woking Borough Council - Community Asset Transfer, Greater Manchester Combined Authority - Inclusive Ownership Platform, UK government Pride in Place programme*

Membership Bodies and Peer Networks

Membership organisations and peer networks connect practitioners, support knowledge exchange and build a collective voice. They provide peer learning, representation and advocacy. Some are major membership bodies with national profiles and a broad remit supporting community-led activity, others are more relational peer networks with a narrower focus on facilitating mutual support between members. Membership bodies and peer networks are one of the most well represented groups from our mapping, emphasising the value placed on this type of infrastructure by those in the field.

→ *Examples: Locality, Plunkett Foundation, Mycelial Network, Co-operatives UK and Community Land Trust Network*

Relational and Partnership Support

Successful community asset development can hinge on the support of intermediaries who can facilitate relationships between communities, councils, funders and larger developers. These organisations act as connectors and mediators of relationships, supporting collaboration where bureaucracy and lack of mutual understanding can become barriers to progress. They help to bridge gaps in power, language and trust. Partnership building is important but often ad hoc. Targeted and proactive relational support is not well represented in the infrastructure landscape.

→ *Examples: Platform Places, Greater London Authority, Mutual Ventures*

Research, Advocacy and Campaigns

Advocacy around community asset development seeks to influence the wider environment the practice operates within. National bodies and focused campaigns document impact, highlight barriers and push for changes to policy. Many infrastructure organisations engage in some form of advocacy, whether organising and giving voice to particular groups, campaigning for changes in national policy or raising awareness of the potential of community asset development.

→ *Examples: Power to Change, Community Land Trust Network, We're Right Here*

Technical Support

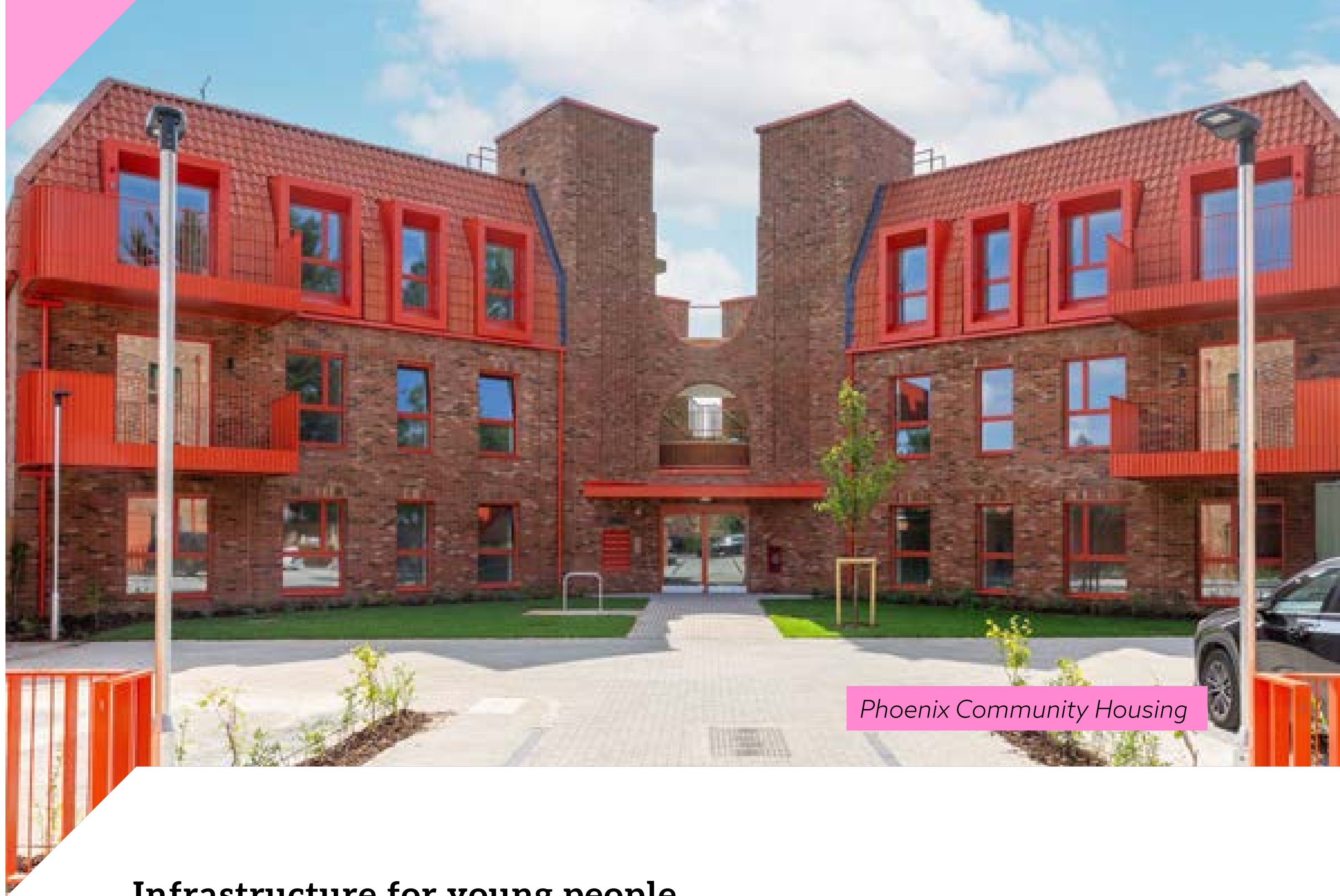
Technical support offers the practical expertise needed to progress asset development projects. This covers areas including business planning, feasibility, design, fundraising and governance. It can come in the form of direct support, advice, toolkits and shared resources. Technical support is sometimes engaged through councils and funders to guide projects that are backed by these organisations, however, it is often more ad hoc and isolated which can limit continuity. National frameworks linked to policy or those previously delivered through national bodies, such as Power to Change, are now limited. This constrains the ability of communities to move through the stages of asset development.

→ *Examples: Public Works, Footwork, Shared Assets, Locality*

Training and Capacity Building

Training and capacity-building initiatives develop the skills and capabilities of organisations required to start, sustain and thrive through community asset development journeys. They cover broad organisational capacities including governance, leadership, finance, operations, community engagement and organising. Capacity building takes many forms, from online resources to training courses, and from mentoring and coaching to pro bono and paid consulting support. Whilst there are diverse capacity building offers available, they are often narrow in focus, not targeted specifically at asset developers and only accessible sporadically.

→ *Examples: Stir to Action, Power to Prosper, The Advocacy Academy*



Phoenix Community Housing

Infrastructure for young people

Community asset development is most effective when it is an intergenerational practice. The involvement of young people in the development and stewardship of assets is essential if assets are to be representative of their communities and sustainable across generations[12]. Our mapping and research, however, revealed very little infrastructure directly involving or supporting young people's involvement in this space.

> *"I want to create a generation of built-environment professionals... that means equipping [young] people with the skills necessary... so that in 20 years' time they can be the people that we call on."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

The examples we did come across were positive. Co-operatives UK has made youth engagement a strategic priority. It hosts a Youth Advisory Group, runs an annual National Youth Summit and resources a dedicated Youth Engagement Coordinator role. The Stour Trust offers mentoring to young people in the communities they work with, as well as involving them in asset development activities from visioning community spaces to attending meetings

12 [Young People and Community Business (2021) Power to Change](#)

with council officers and politicians. Footwork ran a dedicated programme "My Place" in Finsbury Park, London, to empower young people as advocates in the development of their community. In a youth sector context, Blagrave's Listening Fund supported organisations to strengthen how they listen to children and young people across governance and decision making. These initiatives demonstrate the range of ways infrastructure organisations can or could in the future account for the involvement of young people in asset development.

We also heard examples of youth involvement from asset developers themselves. Youth led initiatives Sister Midnight and The Beeches were involved in our focus group. Hasting Commons has developed a Youth Commons to provide opportunities for young people locally, as well as pathways into more meaningful participation in the parent entity. Adrenaline Alley offered a range of ways for young people to get involved in the organisation to develop a sense of inclusion and ownership, including volunteering, training, apprenticeships, employed roles and advisory groups. Similarly, 16-25 Independent People's development of Kingsley Hall involved a Youth Board, apprenticeships and roles in consultation for young people. Across our engagements, we found a genuine desire for youth leadership and involvement.

> *"The incredibly hard thing about [running a youth provision] is sustaining enough resource to run, to meet the demand for what we have been doing, which is four days a week plus trips and holiday activities."*
> *Asset Developer, Interview*

A number of challenges in involving young people in community asset development were articulated to us. Young people can be less aware of asset development and therefore less likely to participate in it as a practice. Expectations and norms around skills, experience, technical knowledge and participation through formal roles and governance structures can all act to exclude young people from the space. Resourcing and sustaining work to involve young people was also a key challenge for already stretched asset developers.

> *"I didn't get into it because I love governance... I got into it because there's a way that you can own a music venue."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Despite the challenges, there are a number of opportunities to encourage the involvement of young people in community asset development. Engagement and awareness raising can support more young people to imagine themselves in space. Engagement is particularly effective when focussed on what asset development can achieve and examples of existing youth involvement.

Asset developers are already keen to work with young people. Resourcing them to create routes for youth participation gives young people more flexible ways to be involved and for some to move towards leadership positions. Routes might range from simple activities and access to physical spaces to paid roles and governance positions. Infrastructure organisations should also be encouraged to increase youth representation in their work through strategy and the involvement of young people in governance and the delivery of their work.

Infrastructure for marginalised communities

As a tool towards self-determination and social justice, those furthest away from power and privilege must have the opportunity to participate in community asset development. Marginalised communities, such as those that are working class and racialised, are often the most impacted by lack of access to local and public assets[13]. They are also all too often excluded from accessing mainstream support for asset development[14].

Despite this, marginalised communities are pioneers in the development of community assets. From the seeds of the NHS being planted in a working class community in South Wales[15] to the Windrush Generation influencing the development of community-led housing[16], a combination of necessity, creativity and long standing cultural traditions mean that marginalised communities are often at the forefront of asset development.

Our mapping found only a handful of equity-focused organisations. Some more mainstream infrastructure bodies are also making efforts to direct resources to underserved communities. Whilst the current scale of these efforts does not meet the need of those facing disadvantage and exclusion across the country, this work supporting marginalised communities highlights principles of practice that may be drawn on in further development of a more equitable field.

Recognising historic and structural disadvantage – The Phoenix Way provides funding to Black and Global Majority communities, recognising their structural disadvantage in access to finance.

Valuing identity and acknowledging culture – Privatise The Mandem frames its work as "strictly for the Mandem", led for and by those from the Ends; working class and racialised neighborhoods.

Targeted engagement and support – Coalfields Regeneration Trust runs targeted programmes in the 30% most deprived coalfield areas across the UK.

Working with partners and intermediaries – Social Investment Business works with partners such as The Ubele Initiative and Create Equity on Flexible Finance to connect more deeply with organisations it does not yet hold networks or trust with, and to stimulate structural change in social investment.

Building leadership and representation in infrastructure – Power to Prosper convenes a Black Asset Builders Collective bringing together asset development experts and practitioners from racialised backgrounds.

> *"And that's why I advocate for a reparative approach...you don't just do the thing of having a funding programme for three years...and that's it. You really have to look at this historically."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

13 Joseph Rowntree Fund (2024) Focusing on doubly-disandvantaged neighbourhoods
14 Power to Change (2023) Exploring barriers to funding and support experienced by marginalised community businesses
15 Royal College of Nursing (2023) NHS 75: the history of our National Health Service
16 Inside Housing (2021) Windrush to G15: the history of Metropolitan Thames Valley

For marginalised communities across the country to be able to realise their potential, we were told that there must be investment in infrastructure to support those who are structurally excluded to participate in community asset development. Investment must be targeted, sensitive to culture and recognise the historic under-resourcing that these communities have experienced.

Regional variations in infrastructure

Support for community asset development is uneven across England, with infrastructure bodies, funders and support disproportionately clustered in London and the South East. Our research revealed 60% of infrastructure organisations mapped were based in London and the South East. This aligns to patterns found by others working in the field[17] and reflects wider London-centric patterns across civil society[18].

Proximity to government, finance and professional support creates advantages. Clusters of activity help sustain peer networks that allow knowledge and information to flow. In contrast, communities in the North, rural communities and coastal towns can face limited access to local technical expertise and weaker access to support.

There is some response amongst infrastructure organisations. Plunkett has targeted "cold spots" with new advisory capacity, Power to Change has invested in northern and coastal catalyst intermediaries and both Key Fund and Black South West Network are strong examples of regional brokers of support and investment.

Infrastructure by asset type

Different types of community assets require distinct forms of expertise, investment and support. Housing, land, community energy, cultural spaces, and commercial properties each come with their own regulatory requirements, business models and operational challenges. This shapes the kinds of technical support, legal support and financing that communities need at each stage of development.

Specialist infrastructure has emerged for most asset types but the extent to which it is established varies. Community-led housing and community energy have more developed advisory bodies, legal frameworks and funding mechanisms. In contrast, support for cultural spaces, high-street spaces and green assets is more fragmented and infrastructure more generalist[19].

Whilst this project did not investigate support for different asset types in depth, our research identified clusters of infrastructure around a range of asset types.

17 Plunkett UK (2025) Community Business Map
18 NCVO (2024) UK Civil Society Almanac: Where are voluntary organisations based?
19 Locality (2016) Places & Spaces: The future of community asset ownership p.g 4

Asset Development Journeys

The process by which communities come to control and steward their own assets is complex, iterative, and deeply context dependent. These "asset development journeys" unfold over years and decades, involve many different stakeholders, are rarely straightforward or linear and, in the end, success is by no means guaranteed.


Wolves Lane

This section provides an overview of the stages communities pass through on their journeys to developing assets. The accounts are drawn from our engagement with those supporting communities and community asset developers themselves. Whilst we can broadly generalise experiences, asset development journeys are always unique to the circumstances, communities and individuals involved. Infrastructure and support must take this into account and seek to be targeted and flexible in its approach.

> *"Typically, they hear that the council wants to sell the building... the lease has been allowed to expire... they get put on a tenancy at will... and then it's kind of panic stations."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Inspiration and awareness

Across our engagements, we heard that asset development journeys are all too often in response to a threat to a community space. These scenarios can galvanise extraordinary movements for collective action. They can also come with a sense of urgency that can be overwhelming for leaders and, as those supporting communities told us, put asset developers on the back foot from the very beginning. When communities have to react to threats to their assets, they need support, advice and information to help them quickly access information, understand their options and plan their next steps.

Proactive beginnings to asset development journeys were described as much less common but, where they are, they help groups to build effective strategy, relationships and local support. Proactive journeys begin through exposure to exemplars elsewhere, the development of strategy through planning, and awareness driven by wider political education.

> *"I started reading a lot and I understood that land ownership is the thing."*
> *Asset Developer, Interview*

→ *Examples: Privatise the Mandem, Decolonising Economics Meet the Pioneers, What to do if a piece of land is under threat*

Pre-development

Pre-development is where asset development work begins to take shape. This happens through feasibility work, relationship-building and exploring options for assets. The stage can be long, resource-intensive and rely on expertise, such as governance, business planning and design. Expertise that's rarely easy to access for communities. On top of this, we frequently heard that pre-development is deeply underfunded. Without revenue funding, communities rely on people giving their time voluntarily. This pressure can lead to momentum and participation falling away, leading projects to stall[20].

> *"Key support around feasibility studies, business planning, architectural drawings...this is often missing... these are critical bits of support required."*
> *Asset Developer, Focus Group*

Progress through pre-development can be shaped by hands-on support that helps communities to identify what they need, as well as supporting them to engage with more technical aspects of this stage. Targeted funding to resource the time of those involved and bring in expertise is also a significant enabler. As are intermediaries who can broker relationships between communities, councils and private developers that might take some of the load off community groups and set them up for future success.

→ *Examples: Power to Change Understanding Community Asset Transfer, Architectural Heritage Foundation Project Viability Grants, Footwork People and Place Programme*

20 [Platform Places (2023) How to secure a building: tactics for community assets]

Development

The development stage is where demands on technical expertise and financial resources peak. Asset developers must engage in legal negotiations, financial modelling, planning processes and they must raise the funds to finance their project. At the same time, the development stage requires communities to balance timelines and needs of different stakeholders and different parts of the process. These rarely align neatly and delays in one part of the process can undermine the whole project. This period is precarious, especially for groups navigating development for the first time or engaging with partners who hold far more power and technical knowledge.

> *"Where is the long-term revenue grant money so that your team can stand up for 10 years...or if planning doesn't come through, your team isn't going to collapse as a result."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Access to finance is fundamental. Successful projects are often built on a mixture of finance including grants, repayable finance, crowdfunding and community shares[21]. The cheaper, more patient, more flexible and simpler the financing arrangements are the better.

Experiences in this stage are also shaped by ongoing relationships. Where councils, funders, developers and communities work together in good faith, engagement is more constructive and projects less precarious. Advisors or peers who can "walk alongside" communities as they navigate technical challenges and moments of uncertainty are needed to support asset developers at this stage too.

→ *Examples: Youth Investment Fund, Community Shares Booster Fund, Shared Assets Common Good Land Users Support*

Post-development

Once an asset is acquired or redeveloped, community groups step into a new phase of operating land or property. This stage can require changes in operational practices, new stakeholder relationships to manage and changes in expectations from the community. We heard how asset developers are often not well prepared. Further complicating matters, reserves of energy, funds and goodwill may have been depleted by years of pre-development and development work. Cost-saving measures during development may impact on projected income or costs post-development. Costs, such as insurance, water and electricity can also increase unexpectedly.

> *"Too often people fixate on the capital to buy it, but then they have a major problem once they're in because there's no money to actually run it."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Organisational capacity, planning and flexible support help groups navigate this stage. Support to build strong leadership and internal practices facilitate organisations to transition to managing new assets. Revenue funding and finance help bridge income gaps and establish sustainable operations. Contact with peers who are ahead in the journeys builds realistic expectations and encourages groups to make effective plans.

→ *Examples: Locality Member Services and Peer Support, Key Fund Working Capital Loans, Energy Resilience Fund*

21 [Impact invest institute (2022) Bridging capital into communities: A practical guide for policy makers]

> ***"We have strong older leadership and it makes it harder for younger people to step into leadership positions"***
> ***Asset Developer, Focus Group***

Succession and renewal

Succession is a frequently overlooked stage of asset development journeys, yet it can be one of the most significant in maintaining assets in community control. Many projects are driven for long periods by a small group of highly committed individuals who keep the wheels turning on precarious assets[22]. After many years, the physical condition of assets can fall into decline, leaders can feel unsure of how to step back and new people may not feel there is space to take on responsibility. This creates real risk that community assets, which require new investments of energy and resources but rely on a small number of embattled individuals, fail to navigate transitions.

Successful succession and renewal draws on intentional practices that plan ahead, bring in new individuals, collectivise stewardship. Time and resource poor community organisations require support to create the space and structure for future looking plans. Once plans are made, funding and capacity building support is required to fill identified gaps. We heard how participation pathways allow people - particular young people and those not typically involved - to contribute, build confidence and take on responsibility. Interventions such as apprenticeships, mentoring and shared governance can help to create a pool of new leaders available to an asset and the community behind it.

→ *Examples: Hastings Youth Commons, The Ubele Initiative Agbero2100, MyCommunity Succession Planning Webinar*

22 The Ubele Initiative (2023) A Place to Call Home 2.0

Emerging Themes

Across our research, some central themes emerged for community asset development and the infrastructure supporting it. This section explores those themes, the challenges they present and opportunities for progressing the field.

Strengthening knowledge infrastructures

Knowledge plays a central role in how communities engage with asset development. We often understand knowledge only as technical expertise but knowledge in this field is much broader. It also includes the stories that inspire action, the lived experience that shapes how people work, and the cultural and ancestral wisdom that guide communities in how they organise. These forms of knowledge are not always represented in mainstream support, but they are equally important to how community asset development happens in practice.

> *"Toolkits and guidance exist, but they're not specific, or they're not up to date, or you can't find them when you need them."*
> *Asset Developer, Focus Group*

Across our research, participants described the difficulty of accessing information when it's needed. Asset developers found themselves searching for relevant guidance across different websites, relying on personal contacts, or simply trying to work things out in isolation. Some groups described starting from scratch, even when we know many similar projects have gone on the same journey before them. Toolkits were valued but were felt to lack specificity, up-to-date information or were difficult to find when they were needed. Peer networks, advice and signposting were highlighted by some but access to them was sparse.

At the same time, there are some forms of knowledge that groups might be more likely to have access to. Many marginalised communities hold cultural and ancestral knowledge that is essential for collective organising[23]. Young people often hold deep place-based and relational knowledge, cultural capital and digital fluency[24]. These forms of knowledge are often not valued by traditional infrastructure in community asset development.

23 brown, adrienne maree (2017) Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds
24 Costanza-Chock, Sasha (2012) Youth and Social Movements: key Lessons for Allies

> *"We're really tapping into our own ancestral and diasporic knowledge base"*
> *Asset Developer, Interview*

Knowledge infrastructures are the systems and practices that allow this knowledge to be captured, shared and used. They show up in different ways from research and documentation to peer networks and events, and from toolkits and advice to signposting.

There are strong examples of what good knowledge infrastructures can look like. Guides and directories, such as Power to Change's Understanding Community Asset Transfer and the MyCommunity Directory, help groups understand their options and navigate the process. Peer learning spaces, for example the Mycelial Network, show how experience can be successfully shared between peers relationally. Asset developers, like Civic Square, model ways of working in the open, documenting their practice as they go and making learning accessible to others. Digital tools like Land Explorer bring together practical information in a way that makes it easier for communities to explore opportunities and understand the landscape around them.

Other fields are solving similar challenges around knowledge flow. In social investment, Good Finance is a knowledge hub, learning portal and directory for the field. For training and leadership development in the social sector, where providers are fragmented and opportunities are difficult to find, the Collective Leadership Group created the artificial intelligence supported Learning and Leadership Navigator tool.

There is scope for better coordination, more accessible and up-to-date materials, and stronger connections between technical knowledge, lived experience and alternative ways of knowing. A first step may be further research into understanding of what exists, how knowledge currently flows and where gaps are. This approach would build the foundation for systematically filling gaps in knowledge infrastructures across the field.

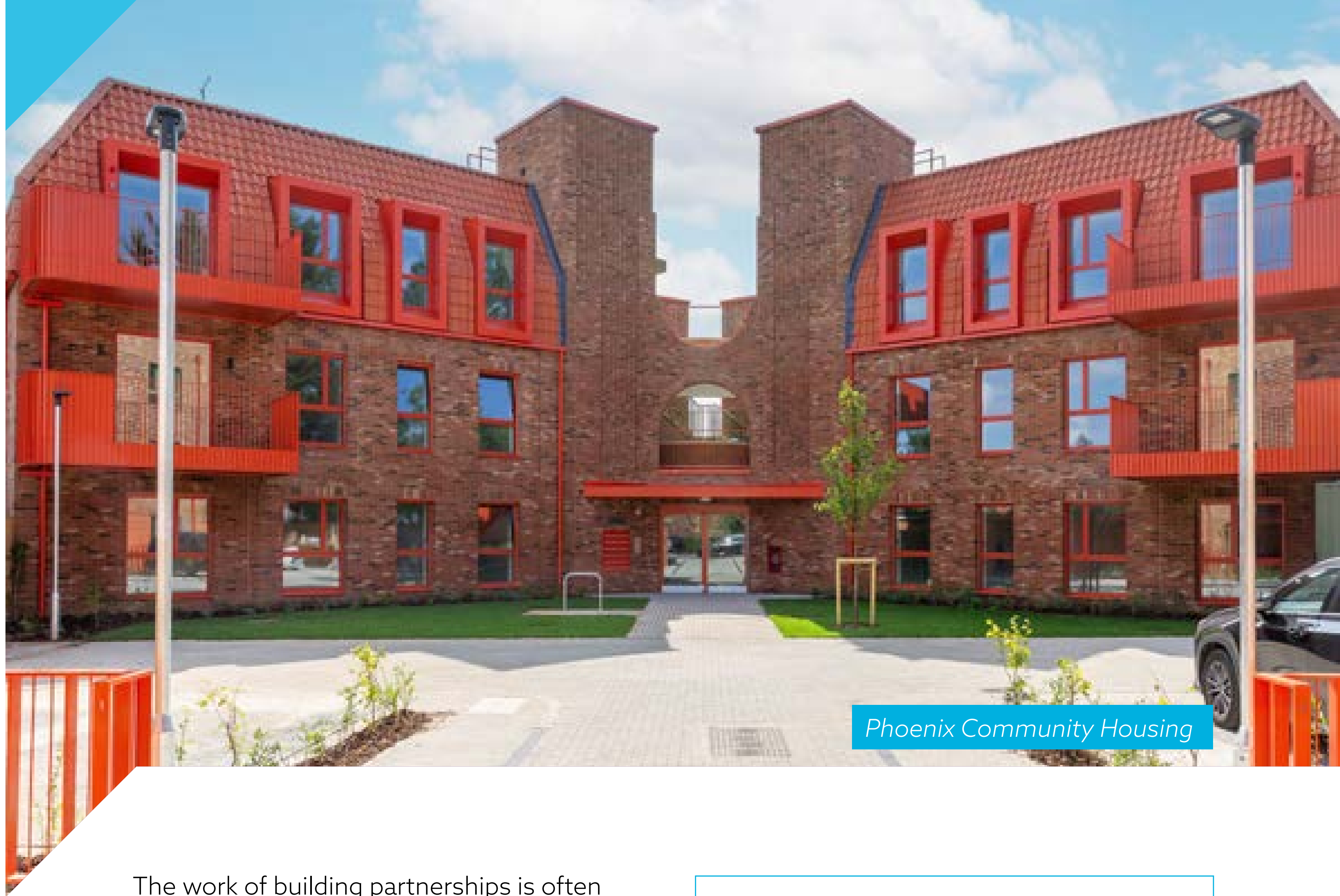
Enabling effective partnerships

Partnerships sit at the centre of most community asset development journeys, even if they rarely receive the same attention as finance or technical expertise. Many of the assets communities want to secure are owned or controlled by councils, housing associations or private developers[25]. These organisations hold the power to unlock access to land and buildings, provide financial support and contribute technical expertise. Because of this, partnerships with councils and developers are almost always key to the success of community asset development projects.

> *"More than three-quarters of the projects our members have completed have been done through those partnerships [with councils, housing associations and property developers]"*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Our definition of partnership is broad. Some are formal arrangements with contractually defined roles, responsibilities and decision-making structures. Others are informal, based on trust and overlapping intentions. Fundamentally, constructive partnerships depend on mutual understanding, shared purpose and the ability to navigate the power differences that sit beneath most of these relationships.

25 [Institute for Community Studies (2022) People shaping places, places shaping people: the role of community asset ownership]



Phoenix Community Housing

The work of building partnerships is often supported by people and organisations who bridge the gaps between different stakeholders. These can be local intermediaries, such as regional authorities or place-based development programmes, who connect communities to aligned actors. Relational support can also come from within communities, councils and developers directly, where these groups intentionally seek to connect across their functional roles and build collaboration. Regardless of where they are situated, these connectors play an important role in translating between cultures and expectations to create the conditions for constructive conversation. This work is often slow and time-intensive. Although it can be key to the success of projects, it remains largely invisible in mainstream accounts of asset development.

> *"One of the bits of infrastructure that's really missing is organisations able to facilitate these partnerships and give confidence to both parties... to make that equitable and effective."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Partnership building has struggled to gain recognition across the field. We heard how narratives about individuals driving success of asset development projects can overshadow the collective and relational work behind successful projects. Funding tends to prioritise activity that is easier to quantify. Guidance on building partnerships exists[26] but is significantly less developed than guidance on areas such as fundraising or business planning. At the same time, pressure on

26 [Business in the community (2019) How to develop good cross-sector partnerships in community investment p.g. 3]

local authority funding and voluntary sector infrastructure[27] mean councils and local intermediaries have far less capacity for relationship building now than they did a decade ago. Following cuts to local authority funding and voluntary sector infrastructure. These shifts have weakened the continuity and local knowledge that many asset development journeys rely on.

There are, however, valuable examples of partnership-building in practice. Platform Places supports communities and institutions to work together in neighbourhoods and helps build a clearer pathway to partnership work through resources and storytelling. Power to Change has previously invested in place-based catalyst organisations, recognising that long-term local intermediaries matter. The Co-operative Councils Innovation Network works with local authorities and council officers to build practice in working more closely with communities around shared goals.

Looking forward, there is a need to bring greater attention to the role that partnerships play in community asset development. Beyond narrative shift, investment in those already promoting partnership work will develop this practice further. Greater support to build the capacity of councils, and other stakeholders with the power to unlock resources for communities, will stimulate an increase in intentional relationship building. Doing so would help ensure that the relational work at the heart of this field is better understood, valued and sustained.

Financing community asset development

Finance is a critical enabler of community asset development. It enables feasibility work, funds technical input and physical works during the development stage, and helps organisations reach sustainability once an asset is operational. Groups draw on different kinds of finance across their journeys - grants, social investment, crowdfunding and community shares.

Despite its enabling potential, finance, or the lack of it, was reported as one of the leading constraints to asset development across our research engagements. The funding system places significant emphasis on capital development and building works while giving far less attention to pre-development and long-term sustainability[28]. Without revenue to resource feasibility work, governance design or community engagement, projects can stall before they get started or start from weak foundations. Groups who do make it through pre-development and developing an asset can then struggle to secure the ongoing income needed to operate them.

> *"We are seeing in the community asset development space bonkers interest when borrowing money for assets."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

27 Directory of social change (2024) Charities and the local government: What does the latest research say?

28 Power to Change (2024) Financing the future economy: How community businesses can access the right finance to achieve their ambitions. Power to Change

Development finance itself comes with its own challenges. Funding cycles rarely align with realities of asset development. We heard how communities find themselves waiting to secure finance while trying to maintain momentum with other stakeholders. Finance is all too often expensive, inflexible, and on short cycles that can limit the choices available to communities[29]. This has implications for groups from marginalised backgrounds with less access to capital[30] and for asset types that do not generate strong commercial returns[31]. Interviewees told us that in some situations, organisations feel compelled to adopt more commercial uses of assets to meet funding requirements. This can lead to business models that sit in tension with aims around community leadership, social purpose and local regeneration.

> *"You can't get certain sorts of financing unless you have a particular balance sheet... it pushes organisations in certain directions."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Finance also brings administrative burdens that are not always recognised. Groups described the weight of reporting requirements, re-financing cycles and navigating multiple funders' conditions at once. For small organisations, these demands sit on top of already stretched capacity and can divert time and energy from core activities.

> *"...we have now secured more than 100 grants and loans...tons and tons of really small ones... there's a huge burden of relationship management, of bureaucracy and administration, not to mention the bidding itself and then not always being successful."*
> *Asset Developer, Interview*

There have been some moves to improve the financing landscape. The Architectural Heritage Foundation provides project viability grants for asset developers to explore the feasibility of projects, but opportunities like this are limited. Resonance offers an Enterprise Investment Fund releasing capital that's more flexible into the market, though it is still not long-term or low interest enough to meet the needs of many community asset developers.

Inspiration may be taken from more innovative approaches. Esmee Fairbairn offers a Land Purchase Facility providing funds for land acquisition upfront and leasing that land to conservation partners with the option to buy later. This reduces the risk and time-pressure on partners of purchasing land of high environmental value. We also heard of historic Property and Green Pre-Planning funds where finance was made available for pre-development costs and were only repayable if capital funds were secured.

29 Practical Governance (2019) Protecting Community Asset Inquiry

30 Commission on Social Investment (2021) Reclaiming the Future: Reforming Social Investment for the Next Decade, pg.54

31 Co-op (2020) In community hands: lessons from the past five years of Community Asset Transfer

More radical approaches, taking into account the historical underinvestment in marginalised communities, exist globally. The Black Feminist fund provides eight year core grants to organisations who work to build collective power, claim justice and create alternatives. The Lilly Endowment's investment $100 million in the United Negro College Fund to establish a permanent endowment to sustain 37 historically Black colleges and universities.

> *"I would love in 15–20 years' time that we've got versions of the Black Feminist Fund...where we're no longer looking abroad for examples of what good looks like, but we've got them at home."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Looking ahead, financing community asset development requires approaches that reflect the full scale and non-linear nature of the work, as well as prioritising social returns over financial. It also requires recognition of the histories of under-resourcing and exclusion that some communities face which shapes who finds it easiest to access funding. Practitioners in the field are leading calls for, and work on, transitions in funding and financing practices through initiatives such as the Community Asset Developers Finance Initiative. Foundations, with the resources, independence and a clear mandate for social change, are well placed to invest in more expansive approaches to financial resourcing the field.

Building a connected ecosystem

Community asset development is supported by an ecosystem of infrastructural support working with communities to take on land and buildings. This ecosystem includes organisations with different functional roles and from varying thematic backgrounds. For ecosystems to function well, they rely on shared purpose, clarity of roles and connection. The ecosystem supporting community asset development is made up of a fragmented set of actors working with different approaches and frameworks, often duplicating efforts and competing for resources, and missing opportunities for collaboration.

> *"I just think it's a very uncoordinated space. I don't think that there's been a whole ecosystem view taken of what we're trying to achieve."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

The landscape of infrastructure for community asset development fragmented. This issue is, in part, down to actors with different functional roles such as funders, technical consultants, peer networks and more, being disconnected. It is, in part, due to the fact that organisations approach community asset development from different thematic perspectives.. For example, there are varying:

- Motivations for developing assets - community-led regeneration, protecting community services, centring the needs of marginalised groups
- Personal practices - asset developers, community organisers, social entrepreneurs
- Legal forms - charities, co-operatives, Community Land Trusts
- Economic frameworks - social enterprise, community business, community wealth building

From our research we heard that this fragmentation is experienced by communities as difficulty knowing what path to take with asset development projects and challenges finding appropriate and timely support.

Funding practices can reinforce fragmentation and embed fragility across the ecosystem. Funding often supports individual organisations rather than promoting collaborative practice. This creates competition for resources reinforcing work in isolation and failing to stimulate motivation to build collective capacity.

> *"Funders like to back a horse... going off with one organisation or one network to the detriment of others... it's not helping communities navigate this messy world."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

There are, however, examples of ecosystem approaches that can bring the field together. Footwork, Platform Places and Mycelial Network have built mutual beneficial ties with each other, recognising their individual strengths and the gaps that the other organisations fill. Co-operatives UK have dual membership and signposting arrangements with other co-operative associations and federations. The Community Led Housing Growth Lab supported organisations in the sector to uncover shared challenges and work on ecosystem responses. Inspiration may be taken from The Joseph Rowntree Foundation which has funded the development of the field building Collective Imagination Practice Community.

Looking ahead, strengthening the ecosystem around community asset development will require investment in approaches that unify the field, support shared purpose and build collaboration. This may start with convening spaces that allow organisations across the ecosystem to identify challenges and develop solutions collaboratively. Funding that enables organisations to work together rather than compete, as well as resourcing ecosystem functions, will also be important.

Navigating inconsistent policy landscapes

Community asset development operates within a unique environment, defined by both national and local policy. Whilst central government sets the legal frameworks that determine what is possible and releases or constrains the funding that can support activity at scale, councils shape the day-to-day local context where communities are based. Policy, political will, and the realities of local authority capacity all influence whether asset developers experience a supportive environment. Policy was one of the most commonly raised themes in our research, often discussed in terms of unpredictability and the difficulties it creates for long-term planning.

> *"If you're not ready to go in a very small window, it's very difficult to engage in these schemes."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

At a national level, policy and funding can be inconsistent. Some attempts have been made to strengthen the national policy landscape - the Localism Act 2011 being the most significant - but these efforts have not gone far enough and continue to fall short of the more enabling approaches such as Scotland's Community Empowerment Act. Interview participants shared challenges with government funding programmes. How the stop-start nature makes them difficult to plan around. That they lack support for groups to apply, so rarely reach communities with the least existing capacity, and how the lack of follow-on funding limits the chances of groups after capital investment. These perspectives are consistent with wider narratives in the field[32].

> *"The Community Ownership Fund is a great example... disadvantage wasn't specifically considered at all in the design of it or the decision-making processes or any kind of weighting to the funding."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

At the level of local authorities, the picture is mixed. Some councils act as enablers - supporting capacity building, sharing information and working with communities to explore options. Others take a more cautious stance, lack the capacity to work with communities, or are forced by financial pressures to sell off assets in ways that limit the ability of communities to engage with them. Local government financial pressures[33] have had a variable effect. Some councils are looking to communities to fill the gaps in public services that are opening up[34], while others are withdrawing support for engagement with communities beyond core duties[35]. The result is a landscape where communities can have very different experiences depending on where they are based.

> *"Many [local authorities] are beleaguered and skint... good people have already left, and those who remain are trying to manage huge portfolios."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

There are examples that show what more enabling practice can look like. The Stour Trust supports communities to use policy levers to navigate their local authority context. The Local Government Association provides resources to empower council officers to support communities around community assets. In London, the Greater London Authority's Cultural and Community Spaces at Risk programme has provided communities with practical support to engage with planning and negotiation processes when buildings come under threat. With the right support, policy environments can be shaped in ways that facilitate community asset development rather than hinder it.

Whilst influencing wider policy is beyond the scope of this project, funders can play a role in supporting the practical work that helps communities operate within the current system. Where local authority practice is uneven, communities will continue to experience very different levels of support. Infrastructure that supports officers to work constructively with communities and shares practice between councils can help to reduce barriers. Under those same circumstances, strengthening support for communities to work with local authorities and navigate their local political landscape is another key lever for progress.

32 [Queens University Belfast (2024) Is government policy a barrier or facilitator to the work of place-based community-led nonprofits]
33 [Institute for Government (2020) Local government funding in England]
34 [Locality (2020) Keep it Local: How local government can plug into the power of community p.g. 4]
35 [UK Parliament (2024) Local government finances: Impact on communities]

Democratic governance and community mobilising practices

Collective stewardship is at the heart of community asset development. There are a range of structures, practices and traditions communities draw on to make decisions together, hold collective responsibility and maintain control of assets. Co-operatives and other democratic organisational structures offer one route towards this[36], while community organising and culturally rooted mobilisation offer another.

Legally recognised democratic organisational structures such as co-operatives, Community Benefit Societies and Community Land Trusts embed collective control and shared benefit in their governing frameworks. Asset developers may also use other organisational structures such as charities and Community Interest Companies that embed social purpose. Democratic organisational forms, however, are more naturally aligned with the goals of community control and support that community asset developers are working towards. We heard of demand from those in the field for more support to understand and navigate these structures.

> *"We're thinking of Community Land Trusts as models, and mutuals as models, and co-operatives as models. What do they look like instead of just setting up a company limited by guarantee"*
> *Asset Developer, Interview*

Democratic structures can be difficult for some groups to access. For example, research by the Co-operatives UK Community Shares found that 98% of co-operative representatives and 92% community shares investors identify as white[37]. Interviewees told us that familiarity with democratic organisational structures can be low amongst young people and marginalised communities. In addition, registering new organisations takes time, confidence and technical knowledge[38], making the process harder for groups with fewer resources.

We also heard of tensions between democratic ideals and both the practical and financial and realities of developing assets. Some groups feel pressure to adopt less democratic and more commercial organisational structures in the short term to make progress.

> *"We often just use existing capitalist models because they are the path of least resistance... co-operative or community benefit structures take much longer to get going."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

36 [Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) Plural ownership of the Economy]
37 [ubele.org/our-work/co-operative-practice]
38 [Co-operatives UK (2020, updated 2023). Simply Legal: All you need to know about legal forms]

> *"I would love to see an ecosystem or resource system that will just fund local people to organise because that's what's going to shift things."*
> *Infrastructure Organisation, Interview*

Support does exist around democratic organisational structures. For example, organisations such as Co-operatives UK and the Community Land Trust Network both provide focal points for groups interested in or using their respective organisational structures. Co-operatives UK has a dedicated youth engagement function and Community Land Trust Network conducts research and offers guidance on engaging a more diverse membership. Both also offer practical help to formally adopt structures. This support does not, however, fully address the need for broader practices of community participation.

Alongside democratic structures, our research revealed how communities draw on wider traditions of collective organising and cultural practices that shape how people organise. Examples include organising through religious institutions, rotating savings schemes used in diaspora communities such as Pardna and Susu, and traditions of mutual aid. These approaches ground collective participation and can sit alongside formal governance, or operate independently of it, in the stewardship of assets.

Again, infrastructure and support for this kind of work does exist. Organisations such as Citizens UK and Civic Power Fund have a national profile supporting grassroots organising. Support for culturally rooted forms of community mobilisation are less well established. Entities such as Kinfolk Network and Nourishing Economics are delivering pioneering work around culturally rooted and liberatory economic practice but these are small organisations and relatively isolated examples.

Collective stewardship is about both organisational structures and organising practices. Democratic organisational structures are naturally aligned to the goals of community asset developers. There are opportunities to expand the reach of infrastructure promoting democratic organisational structures into a greater number and a more diverse range of communities. The field must also be more intentional about integrating the role of wider organising and mobilisation practices.

Recommendations

The recommendations in this section reflect the findings from our research and engagement mapping the field of community asset development. They are designed to strengthen the infrastructure supporting asset developers working in communities across England. These recommendations are primarily intended to guide where future investment might be directed by funders and foundations with strategic priorities aligned to supporting the field. They also offer practitioners and infrastructure organisations focal points for building a more enabling landscape.

1 Support youth participation pathways

Why – Community asset developers are keen to involve young people and young people bring vital skills, perspectives and diversity. Yet there are limited opportunities for them to build the skills, experience and confidence needed to engage meaningfully in asset development. Strengthening intergenerational leadership requires intentional routes for young people to participate.

How – Create structured learning and participation pathways that offer direct experience of community asset development. These may include resourcing asset developers to deliver placements, mentoring, apprenticeships, employment, governance roles or structured schemes focused on specific elements such as visioning, design and community organising. Supporting these pathways will bring greater youth representation into community asset development, help cultivate future asset leaders and support the long-term sustainability of assets.

2 Embed youth representation in infrastructure

Why – Many infrastructure organisations value youth representation but lack models to build youth involvement and leadership meaningfully. This limits their ability to support truly diverse and sustainable communities and assets.

How – Encourage organisations to develop commitments and practical approaches to embedding youth voice. This may involve convening and funding organisations to develop youth advisory groups, youth engagement functions or involving young people in programme design and delivery. Creating space for youth participation across the ecosystem strengthens decision-making, reinforces new norms and expands opportunities for young people.

3 Map knowledge infrastructure, identify gaps and invest systematically in what's missing

Why – Toolkits, success stories, peer networks and directories exist, but these knowledge infrastructures are often invisible or inaccessible at the moments communities need them. There is a limited understanding of what knowledge infrastructure already exists and where gaps lie.

How – Work with practitioners and infrastructure organisations to map existing knowledge infrastructures. Use this to identify gaps and guide systematic investment, whether by improving visibility of existing resources, supporting peer knowledge flow, or creating hubs and channels for distributing knowledge.

4 Build storytelling and narrative infrastructure around under-recognised practice

Why – Much of the work that underpins community asset development is under-documented and undervalued. Relationship-building, community organising, practitioner knowledge and cultural practice remain largely absent from mainstream narratives.

How – Support practitioners and organisers to document and share their work, embedding their stories in shared platforms. Strengthening narrative infrastructure broadens understanding of effective community leadership, shifts perceptions across the ecosystem and contributes to a more accurate, practice-based narrative of how community asset development actually happens.

5 Develop patient financial facilities

Why – Communities are often excluded from asset ownership due to high land and property prices, the high pace of sales and challenges of raising finance. Existing repayable finance is not appropriate. It is high-cost, short-term and inflexible relative to the realities of asset development.

How – Invest in alternative financing models that increase access. This may include direct or pooled purchase facilities that acquire assets on behalf of communities while they build capacity, or a mutually owned community asset investment fund led by asset developers themselves.

6 Offer pre- and post-development support

Why – Pre-development and post-development stages are underfunded. Communities struggle with feasibility, engagement and design early on, and can face sustainability challenges after acquisition.

How – Provide funding that responds to these realities, including pre- and post-development grants for feasibility work and for filling gaps after capital investment. Alternatively, offer repayable finance that is only returned once capital investment is secured or post-development income targets are met.

7 Roll out policy navigation support for communities

Why – Communities often face complex and inconsistent policy environments. Tools like Assets of Community Value, the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 can be enablers, especially for communities who lack the finance to purchase assets, but many lack the expertise to use them effectively.

How – Strengthen policy navigation support through practical training and accessible guidance that builds policy literacy. Given the variability of local authority approaches, support must also go beyond standard training and information to incorporate flexible options such as advice and technical support, coaching and peer support.

8 Develop learning networks for councils, building and housing developers

Why – Councils, building and housing developers strongly influence whether community asset development succeeds, yet many lack experience of collaborative practice with communities. Differences in priorities, expectations and language act as barriers to constructive relationships.

How – Create a learning network where these actors can better understand community needs, share emerging enabling approaches and develop more consistent ways of working with asset developers. Over time, this would improve collaboration, reduce relational friction and create more enabling conditions for community asset development.

9 Invest in ecosystem building

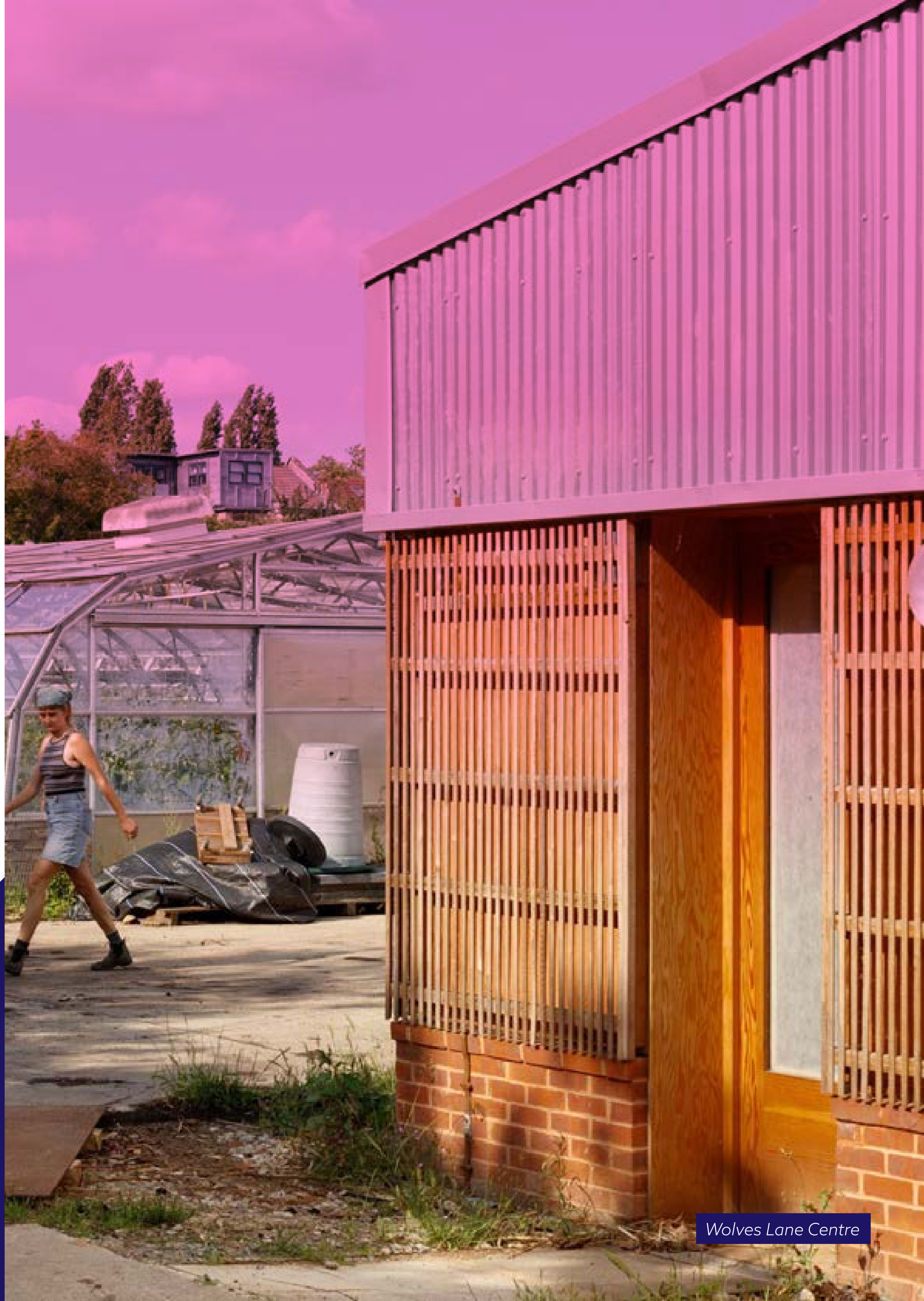
Why – The community asset development ecosystem is rich but fragmented. Infrastructure is often tied to particular motivations, organisational forms or economic frameworks, making the field less coherent than it should be.

How – Invest in ecosystem-building approaches rather than individual organisations. This may involve funding ecosystem roles such as navigators, creating funds that encourage partnerships or convening spaces that enable organisations to tackle shared challenges and build solutions collaboratively.

10 Create bridges between culturally grounded mobilisation and democratic organisational structures

Why – Community organising practices and democratic legal structures are both essential to collective stewardship, yet organising practices, particularly within marginalised communities, are often underrecognised. These communities may be rich in cultural organising traditions but underrepresented in formal democratic structures.

How – Support organisations and practitioners working in both democratic structures and culturally rooted organising. Fund documentation of practice to strengthen connections between mobilisation, governance development and asset journeys. This builds more diverse practice and stronger alignment between different traditions of collective stewardship.



Wolves Lane Centre

The Ubele Initiative
Wolves Lane Centre
Wolves Lane
London N22 5JD
www.ubele.org.uk

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