

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY BUSINESS ON THE HIGH STREET

Visioning the future of high street

COMMUNITY BUSINESS MUTUAL AID: SESSION SUMMARY DOCUMENT - Tuesday 28th July

This is a summary document of the discussions that were had in each of the sessions run on the CB Mutual Aid group.

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RESEARCHING THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY BUSINESS ON THE HIGH STREET

THEMES

- Idea that CBs do more than most businesses to increase the desirability of high streets as destinations, increasing footfall and creating events that people want to come to - such as markets, food, culture.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Local authority support is important - people have had rent and rate free deals. But short-term arrangements are not that helpful. Meanwhile use and short leases make it difficult to plan ahead and also to access funding.
- Interesting point made that 'community' has become a buzz word & is being used by private business - issue of imitation & whether CBs are at risk of being priced out of being part of regeneration as larger businesses see the market value of CB & capitalise o

CHALLENGES

- General consensus that there is a lack of awareness of CB, and lack of buy-in to the idea of CB and of community ownership - need to work towards a changed mindset in economic thinking, seeing community ownership as important (also coops and social enterprise). Advocacy & awareness-raising is still needed to make CBs seen as mainstream, something you'd want on the high street alongside other businesses.
- Need to continue to tackle the perceptions held by councils and other businesses who equate community or voluntary with amateur and don't recognise the free skills being contributed. COVID has shown the strength, capacity and agility of CB.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Resilience - examples of how places that responded quickly & well to COVID-19 did so off the back of existing networks and CBs. Does community ownership make for better place resilience

A MENU OF MODELS FOR THRIVING MIXED USE HUBS

THEMES

- Core ingredients for thriving mixed use hubs
 - A localised social movement
 - A clean brand and user experience
 - A lean business operation

(See models in the examples sections)

CONSIDERATIONS

- The traditional retail-focussed high street has died
 - 12% shops empty pre-COVID-19
 - 20,000 units expected not to re-open
 - Amazon sales peaking at \$12,000 / second
- Replace high streets with locally-led, mixed use hubs
 - "Forget retail for town centres, they need to become community hubs based on health, education, entertainment, leisure and arts and crafts" – Bill Grimsey, ex-CEO Wickes, Iceland & Focus DIY

CHALLENGES

- How do you create the right conditions for these conversations in the first place? Examples from elsewhere of places that had no interest in community business → blueprint for cultural change.
- How to persuade councils to lower rents? And demonstrate social/economic value – note: any charitable organisation should be able to receive some rate relief.
- How can we add community spaces into housing?
- Communities often don't see this as a serious business approach! think it's just knitting circles

OPPORTUNITIES

- [Hidden Treasure: How we found a secret map of £7bn council assets](#)
- Locality launched Save our Spaces aimed at councils last year <https://locality.org.uk/policy-campaigns/save-our-spaces/> to make case that spaces are valuable in community hands

- Twine Benchmark can help you compare your finances to other CBs. It's free
<https://www.twine-together.com/benchmark>

EXAMPLES

- [Library of things](#) - Set-up costs: £30k, Space needed: 8sqm, Revenue to hub: ~£3k / year from Y2, Cost to hub: £0 (external operator absorbs cost), Net income per sqm: £375
- **Co-working and meeting spaces** - At Flameworks CIC, we rent out studios. We renegotiated hereditaments from one to 16 so that each studio-holder paid their own business rates. This enabled them all to claim small business rate relief - saving the organisation £9000 a year.
- **Community kitchen** - [Brighton & Hove Community Kitchen](#)
- **Local Market** - Inspiration: Crystal Palace Food Market (includes incubator programme for small food businesses)
- **Local Business Incubator** - Incubator type can be themed to building type eg. food incubator in community kitchen/ food market, making/ crafts incubator in makerspace etc.
- **Community bar and café** - Alcohol license. Trained baristas. Save overheads by having cafe staff as building hosts – Inspiration: The Old Baths, Hackney Wick & Upper Norwood Library Hub, Crystal Palace.
- **Post office** - <https://runapostoffice.co.uk>
- **Maker Space** - Dry and messy workshop spaces, materials storage, specialist machinery rooms. Membership model. Inspiration: Open Workshop London network
- **Creative studio space** - Recording studio, photography/ film studio, podcast/ radio space. Specialist equipment available. Inspiration: The Old Baths, Hackney Wick
- **Childcare Cooperative** - Safe play spaces, quiet spaces, outdoor spaces. Motivated parents with flexible time. Inspiration: Radical Childcare, Birmingham. Little Pioneers Coop, London, <https://www.littlepioneers.coop/>
- **Bulk food buying / zero waste goods** - Resident-led bulk-buy cooperatives for food and household products OR zero-waste concession unit. Inspiration: Sussex Food Cooperative. The Grain Grocer, Margate
- **Intergenerational Housing**