

Co-operatives West Midlands: Save Birmingham campaign to protect community places

Barrow Cadbury Grant Final Report, August 2025



Objectives of grant

1. Developing the working relationship with Birmingham City Council (BCC).
2. Building the campaign and raising the profile of the situation in Birmingham and options for residents to take action.
3. Sharing our learning with communities in other LA areas facing similar issues.
4. Continuing to support organisations to complete ACV applications via 1-2-1 support and events (target 50 further ACVs registered).
5. Work with 10 to 15 community organisations (or consortiums) to explore the feasibility of running a community asset.
6. Offer tailored support to 6 organisations/consortiums to develop a full application for a Community Asset Transfer, including business planning, financial forecasting and risk assessment.

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AT A GLANCE



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AWARENESS RAISING ACTIVITIES INCLUDING ATTENDING EVENTS, CONFERENCES & 5 SHAPING BIRMINGHAM'S FUTURE TOGETHER MARKETPLACES

18 COMMUNITY GROUPS SUPPORTED WITH GENERAL ADVICE



GROUPS ASSISTED WITH ACV APPLICATIONS

14

ORGANISED 6 WORKSHOPS ON ACVS, CAT & VALUING WORTH



Contributed to **Economic Justice Brum & Transformative Economics Huddle** meetings. Helped deliver **Coalition 4 Impact** project in East Birmingham.



6

MEDIA INTERVIEWS INCLUDING ITV NEWS, 2 X BIRMINGHAM DISPATCH ARTICLES & 1 PODCAST

YOUTH CENTRES



17 GROUPS HELPED WITH AN EOI FOR COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

COMMUNITY CENTRES

1-2-1 support for 6 Groups in Valuing Worth Process including 2 co-operatives. 7 Community Centres transferring from BCC to Community Organisations via Community Asset Transfer (CAT)



31% INCREASE IN FOLLOWERS ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

547 POSTS WITH A GOOD AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT ACROSS PLATFORMS OF 1.1%



SAVEBIRMINGHAM.ORG



Narrative Report

This section of the report covers the first three objectives of our current Barrow Cadbury Trust grant:

1. Developing the working relationship with Birmingham City Council (BCC).
2. Building the campaign and raising the profile of the situation in Birmingham and options for residents to take action.
3. Sharing our learning with communities in other LA areas facing similar issues.

The initial aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of the financial challenges facing BCC and the potential impact on residents. We have successfully raised the profile of the ACV register and enabled many more places to be added to this. This is an important step in empowering residents and demonstrating that there are positive actions that can be taken to protect their community assets.

BCC are now auditing community assets and identifying those for disposal. The focus of the campaign in this second grant funding period has moved to supporting community groups that are exploring the options of taking over community assets, primarily via the process of Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

Engagement with BCC

Shaping Birmingham's Future Together

In March 2024, BCC launched [Shaping Birmingham's Future Together](#) which is a partnership approach to developing the City Vision and the Birmingham Promise. The council has made a commitment to working with citizens, local communities and strategic partners.

Save Birmingham has been actively engaged in this and has attended a number of the consultation events. We have fed back into this process since its inception.

Unfortunately, we consider this approach to be flawed in many ways:

- the approach is still very patriarchal and led by BCC's objectives,



- the marketplace 'consultation' events are still very much a one-way passage of information and not true consultation with citizens,
- it does not yet feel that there are clear pathways for community organisations to truly be able to 'co-create' and design services.

However, we feel that it is important to have a seat at the table and continue to advocate for local communities, particularly around the issue of community assets. We are committed to continue to provide feedback and be a critical friend to the consultations that BCC is undertaking through this initiative. Although we feel that the methodology that BCC is undertaking is not perfect, we appreciate that this is still an opportunity to have our voices heard and it is important that we are engaged with it.

Community Centres

Expressions of Interest (EoIs) were invited from community groups interested in Community Centres during the Summer of 2024. SB provided support to some of the groups in submitting their EoI. Shortlisting was made by BCC and several groups were invited to interview. SB ran an online session specifically for these groups, focussed on preparing for their interview.

Preferred Community Partners (PCPs) were then identified for 7 of these Community Centres. Part of the CAT application is the completion of Valuing Worth (VW), which is the social value tool used by BCC in order to calculate any potential offset to the market rate of the lease. SB delivered an online workshop on the VW process, which covered how to complete the form and advised of the supporting documents and evidence required.

SB was then approached by the Head of Communities at BCC to submit a tender to deliver tailored 1-2-1 support to these groups in completing their VW submission, which was successful. This included assistance in completing the form, as well as assessing the business plan and finances of the organisation, and also evaluating how their proposed use of the building aligns with BCC's strategic priorities and individual ward plans. SB delivered this support to 6 community organisations in relation to 7 Community Centres across the city. This work was completed in April



2025, and the CAT applications were passed over to BCC's legal team for completion.

As we reach August 2025, none of the transfers have yet been completed, although the expected timeframe for 3 of the 7 is September/October 2025. This is the stage of the process where CATs have historically been held up, due to the nature of legal negotiations when clarifying the terms of the lease. We are still in contact with the Head of Communities at BCC and are hopeful that all 7 transfers will reach completion.

This is exactly the type of partnership working that SB had hoped for when the campaign was initially launched, and we are pleased that BCC has acknowledged the benefit of working directly with us to offer support to community groups that are seeking to save some of the city's community assets.

Youth Centres

EoIs were invited from BCC for 10 of the city's Youth Centres in October 2024, with a short deadline of 4 weeks. SB supported a number of applicants in submitting these, which included requirements of 3 years of accounts and details of how the groups propose to finance the running of these buildings.

In January it was announced that BCC will be retaining 4 of the centres, meaning that the remaining 6 will be disposed of. Following a further review in May, BCC informed us that 2 more of the centres would also be retained and passed over to other service areas within the council.

It is anticipated that the remaining 4 centres will still be made available for CAT. The proposal is going to a Cabinet Meeting for approval on 18th August 2025, and interviews to select the Preferred Community Partners (PCP) will happen thereafter.

We have agreed that we will once again provide a training session on preparing for the interview, which will be available to all groups shortlisted. Once PCPs have been selected, we also intend to provide support to these groups in completing the full application. We hope that there will also be an opportunity to tender for the full Valuing Worth support that we delivered in regards to Community Centres.



The working relationship with Youth Services has not been as productive and transparent as it has been in regards to Community Centres, which has been frustrating. We have also fed back to BCC that the decision as to which Youth Centres would be made available for potential CAT should have been completed before opening the invitation for Expressions of Interest (EoI). Many community groups have wasted time and resources on completing an EoI for a centre that is no longer available, which again is very frustrating.

Libraries

Following extensive consultation on Library Services, the council's proposal was signed off by Cabinet in February 2025. This included 7 libraries that will no longer be run by BCC, and are likely to be made available for CAT. Since then, 1 of these libraries has been closed completely after BCC announced that the building was in a worse state of repair than anticipated and it would not be cost effective to keep it open.

SB is also aware of some other libraries that are due to be retained by BCC, but will only be open for part-time hours. There is therefore scope for some of these sites to be 'co-managed' with community partners, although the details of these arrangements are not yet known.

No further information has been provided by BCC on the timelines for this since. As stated in our February and May reports, we are still intending to offer tailored support to those community groups that are selected as PCPs for libraries or selected to 'co-manage' a library.

Social Media

During our Steering Group meeting in April, we made the decision to stop using Twitter (X). The number of followers on other platforms has increased by 31%.

Our current social media stats are as follows:

- Facebook - 391 followers
- Instagram - 664 followers
- LinkedIn - 518 followers



Our engagement rate across social media is consistently good at above 1%, demonstrating that our supporters are actively engaging with our content, rather than just being passive listeners. This is due to us regularly engaging with other users via tagging, sharing, and replying.

Awareness Raising

Date	Event	Partnerships / Connections
7.9.24	Nottingham Green Festival	Invited by Co-ops East Midlands. Notts City Council also declared a Section 114 notice.
28.9.24 29.9.24	NEON Transformative Organising Training	Connecting with other B'ham based groups
25.10.24	MAIA event (speaker) https://www.maiagroup.co/	Connecting with other B'ham based groups
21.11.24	Social Economy Showcase https://socialeconomydrive.com/	Raising awareness of SB campaign
26.11.24	Economic Justice Brum (speaker)	Raising awareness of SB campaign Connecting with other B'ham based groups
3.12.24	Democratic Business Summit, Cardiff	Raising awareness of SB campaign
9.1.25	SB coverage on ITV Central News (specifically featuring the new 'At Risk' assets map)	Raising awareness of SB campaign
14.1.25	Meeting with Blagrove (charitable trust looking to invest in youth work in Brum) https://www.blagravetrust.org	Raising awareness of SB campaign



	/	
27.1.25	BCU Architecture showcase - Beyond Austerity	Raising awareness of SB campaign
29.1.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together Marketplace event (Hall Green)	Raising awareness of SB campaign
31.1.25 1.2.25	Future Co-ops 2025 (marketplace stand)	Raising awareness of SB campaign
5.2.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together consultation event	Raising awareness of SB campaign
12.2.25 13.2.25	Co-operative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN) Conference	Raising awareness of SB campaign Learning and networking: co-operative solutions from other Local Authorities
26.2.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together Marketplace event (Witton Lodge)	Raising awareness of SB campaign
3.3.25	BCC Neighbourhood Development and Support Unit (NDSU) Funding Fair	Raising awareness of SB campaign
13.3.25	We're Right Here campaign - social event in Birmingham	Raising awareness of SB campaign Learning and networking: community-led initiatives from elsewhere in the UK
2.4.25	Speaker at Stir to Action's 'Developing a Community Campaign' session - part of the ABCs Workshops	Raising awareness of SB campaign and sharing tips and campaign strategies
9.4.25	Birmingham Community Matters (BCM) meet-up	Raising awareness of SB campaign Connecting with other B'ham based groups



10.4.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together (SBFT) City Vision Launch event	Raising awareness of SB campaign Connecting with other B'ham based groups
30.4.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together Marketplace event (Hodge Hill)	Raising awareness of SB campaign
15.5.25	Building readiness for Birmingham's City Vision event, hosted by BVSC	Raising awareness of SB campaign Connecting with other B'ham based groups
21.5.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together Marketplace event (Selly Oak)	Raising awareness of SB campaign
18.6.25	BSSEC meeting, Witton Lodge	Raising awareness of SB campaign Connecting with other B'ham based groups
24.6.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together (SBFT) Partnership Meeting	Raising awareness of SB campaign Connecting with other B'ham based groups. Contributing to the development of the 'Birmingham Promise'
3.7.25	CLES Community Wealth Building Summit in Manchester	Raising awareness of SB campaign Learning and networking: community-led initiatives from elsewhere in the UK
5.7.25	AGM of York Supplies (a CBS based in South Brum)	Raising awareness of SB campaign and CWM co-op development offer. Connecting with other B'ham based groups
17.7.25	BSSEC meeting, Wolverhampton	Raising awareness of SB campaign Connecting with other B'ham based groups
23.7.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future	Raising awareness of SB campaign



	Together Marketplace event (Perry Barr)	
Upcoming: 5.9.25	New Organising Conference, Liverpool	Raising awareness of SB campaign Learning and networking: community-led initiatives from elsewhere in the UK
Upcoming: 22.9.25	Warm Welcome Marketplace, Edgbaston	Raising awareness of SB campaign
Upcoming: 25.9.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together Marketplace event (Northfield)	Raising awareness of SB campaign
Upcoming: 22.10.25	Shaping Birmingham's Future Together Marketplace event (Yardley)	Raising awareness of SB campaign
Upcoming: 4.11.25	Democratic Business Summit	Raising awareness of SB campaign Learning and networking: community-led initiatives from elsewhere in the UK

Sharing our Learning

We also continue to attract some media coverage of the campaign, including:

- Featuring on ITV Central News on 20th February - <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18Rr1yAqFj/>
- Conducting an interview with Journalism students from BCU for a podcast - <https://open.spotify.com/episode/63LxnsBppe9Cds0Ai607x3?si=1sR9nz0pTgms0Qh-tWDnkQ>
- Interviews for 2 articles in the [Birmingham Dispatch](https://www.birminghamdispatch.co.uk/secretive-and-rushed-inside-the-fire-sales-flogging-1bn-of-brums-public-assets/) - <https://www.birminghamdispatch.co.uk/secretive-and-rushed-inside-the-fire-sales-flogging-1bn-of-brums-public-assets/> and <https://www.birminghamdispatch.co.uk/the-local-groups-trying-to-buy-brum-back/>



- Interview with [Research for Action](https://researchforaction.uk/guide-local-councils-in-crisis-and-how-westmins-ter-intervenes) to contribute to this report - <https://researchforaction.uk/guide-local-councils-in-crisis-and-how-westmins-ter-intervenes>

We have also made connections with national campaigns that align with Save Birmingham, particularly around issues of local democracy. These include:

- We're Right Here - <https://www.right-here.org/>
- #DoWith - <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/projects/do-with>

Legacy and Future Plans

Since its inception in 2012, Co-operatives West Midlands (CWM) had remained an unincorporated group. Following the success of running the Save Birmingham Campaign, it was decided that we should formally constitute to provide more stability and sustainability.

CWM registered as a Co-operative Society in June 2025, and has since re-launched our membership offer. With the Government's commitment to doubling the size of the co-op economy, alongside the potential growth of community organisations in Birmingham taking on community assets, we felt it timely that we develop our network and increase our membership.

Our Co-operative Business Development offer has seen more uptake in recent months and we are confident in our future sustainability and ability to grow. Should there be an opportunity to access funding for co-operative development work from central, regional or local governments in the future, we are now in a much stronger position to tender for such work.



Data Report

This section of the report covers the final three objectives of our current Barrow Cadbury Trust grant:

- Continuing to support organisations to complete ACV applications via 1-2-1 support and events (target 50 further ACVs registered).
- Work with 10 to 15 community organisations (or consortiums) to explore the feasibility of running a community asset.
- Offer tailored support to 6 organisations/consortiums to develop a full application for a Community Asset Transfer, including business planning, financial forecasting and risk assessment.

Summary of support to community groups throughout Birmingham

Support for Community Groups - topic	Number of groups supported
Submitting an EoI for potential Youth Centre CAT	15
Submitting speculative EoIs for other assets	2
Tailored 1-2-1 support for Community Centre CAT Valuing Worth process	6 groups in relation to 7 centres
Supporting in completing an ACV application	14
General support or advice	19
Support provided via C4i project in East Birmingham*	6



Training and Workshops Delivered:

Topic	Date	Number of attendees	Could not attend, but received workshop materials
Preparing for a CAT interview	26.9.24	6	1
Introduction to Valuing Worth	17.12.24	16	22
ACVs and CATs*	9.1.25	8	3
Introduction to Valuing Worth	17.12.25		
Introduction to Valuing Worth	10.3.25	6	0
Business Planning*	27.3.25	8	0
Properties held in Trust	12.5.25	BCC staff	0

*Part of the Coalition 4 Impact project in East Birmingham, of which SB were a delivery partner (project ended March 2025):

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20008/planning_and_development/2814/east_birmingham_inclusive_growth_programme/6



Objectives:

Continuing to support organisations to complete ACV applications via 1-2-1 support and events (target 50 further ACVs registered).

We provided direct support in completing an ACV application to 14 organisations during this grant period, and delivered training on the process of registering an ACV to a further 11 individuals. Some of the general support and advice to groups (n=19) was also in regards to the process of applying for an ACV, even if we did not directly assist in the completion of the form.

The current ACV register available on Birmingham City Council's website was last updated in March 2025, and shows the most recent listing as August 2024 ([link here](#)). We believe that more assets have been added to the list since that date and the register has not yet been updated. However, this means we are unable to state the exact figure.

Although we can ascertain that a total of 20 assets have been added to the register since the campaign's inception in September 2023, we suspect that we have not successfully reached our ambitious target of 50 new registrations during this particular funding period.

Offer tailored support to 6 organisations/consortiums to develop a full application for a Community Asset Transfer, including business planning, financial forecasting and risk assessment.

We successfully achieved this objective and worked with 6 organisations to successfully apply for a CAT for 7 assets across Birmingham. These are West Heath Community Centre, Kings Heath Community Centre, Summerfield Community Centre, Oddingley Hall, Stanhope Community Centre, Sheldon Community Centre and Masefield Wellbeing Hub.

We worked with these groups to help them prepare for their interviews, develop their Business Plans and financial forecasts and also completed their Valuing Worth assessments with them (this is the social value tool that BCC uses). This Valuing Worth figure is then offset against the market rent of the asset. In all 7 cases, the



social value of the organisation exceeded the market rent, meaning that they will in effect pay £0 rent. They will of course still be liable for business rates, utility bills and other running costs etc.

Work with 10 to 15 community organisations (or consortiums) to explore the feasibility of running a community asset.

In addition to the above 6 organisations that are all now at the final stage of lease negotiations with BCC's legal team, we have also achieved the following in relation to this objective:

- Supported 3 further groups that were already in the process of negotiating a CAT lease with BCC, and are still ongoing. These are Sahili Hub, Stans Cafe and St Paul's Development Trust.
- Support to 6 organisations within the C4i project, who are all interested in acquiring an asset. We held a Business Planning session with them to explore their readiness for such an undertaking.
- Supporting 17 organisations to submit an EoI for an asset, which is the initial step in the CAT process.



Budget Report

Full breakdown of spend can be found in the separate budget document.

Our underspend for this grant is currently sitting at a figure of £8,064.10. However, we have commissioned Anthony Collins Solicitors to undertake some work for us, for which we have not yet been invoiced. We expect this to be in the region of £3 to £5K.

Considering the financial sustainability of the campaign, we have submitted an application for a 3 year grant from Esmee Fairburn (value £250K), following a successful Expression of Interest (EoI). We were invited to interview on 20th August 2025. The funding panel is due to meet on 8th October 2025 to make a decision.

