



**Developing public-civic
partnerships: A new model to
support the Leeds Ambitions**

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Marie-Avril Berthet, Paul Chatterton, Pete Tatham, Rebecca Brunk



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Executive summary

Public-Civic Partnerships (PCPs) are a new, exciting route for the local state and civil society to co-create, co-manage and co-own public resources and/or assets together. By fostering equal partnerships between Leeds City Council (LCC) and community organisations, PCPs can assist in maintaining and developing public assets in ways that align with local needs and long-term civic priorities.

Key benefits of PCPs to LCC:

- **Enhanced financial sustainability:** PCPs help councils manage financial pressures by leveraging civic resources, reducing maintenance costs and reinvesting revenue into community projects.
- **Long-term asset preservation:** In contrast to selling public assets for shorter-term gains, PCPs create a sustainable model in which assets remain in public stewardship while being effectively deployed by community actors, who can unlock different sources of funding. PCPs assist in alleviating financial pressures on LCC, whilst maintaining assets in public hands.
- **Support LCC in delivering the Leeds Ambitions:** Through working with community partners, PCPs can deploy and deliver services and assets that respond to new challenges with climate, environmental, wellbeing and inclusive growth outcomes. This can strengthen civic infrastructure and enhance local resilience by utilising local expertise.
- **Support the Team Leeds approach:** In particular, it supports the Team Leeds ambition to ‘empower people to generate the positive changes they want to see, enabling communities to thrive and tackle systemic inequalities’. PCPs also enhance community capacity and improve working with the voluntary and community sectors in the city.

- **Position LCC as a national exemplar** in both asset management and empowering communities.

Recommendations:

We make four key recommendations aimed at different parts of LCC, all of which can support the development of the PCP model and realise these benefits in Leeds:

1. City Development creates an approach for meanwhile or temporary partnerships for the use of disused land or buildings listed for disposal.
2. Asset Management streamlines its community partnership process by standardising leases and licenses.
3. LCC undertakes a consultation to assess the use and viability of longer-term PCPs.
4. The PCP model is trialled as part of the Team Leeds approach.



Introduction

This policy brief is part of the University of Leeds' Policy Support Fund work with LCC. It outlines routes to adopt a **Public-Civic Partnership (PCP)** model of asset management in which local councils collaborate with community organisations to co-manage public land and assets.

This model would enhance the existing **Community Asset Transfer (CAT)** model currently used by local authorities. It would also support LCC's Leeds Ambitions plan, which focuses on health, inclusive growth, thriving communities and resilience as core priorities, by emphasising communities as key partners in achieving these goals.

PCPs have the potential to respond to some of the limitations of the current approach to CAT, which allows community organisations to acquire public assets on a long-term basis. In this approach, community use is only considered after assets are deemed surplus to requirements or unsaleable in terms of market value.

Due to significant external financial pressures, there is an understandable reliance on selling public assets to meet shortfalls in the Council's budget, an approach which in the long term will continue to reduce the Council's public estate. Further, CAT is limited to maintaining past and present services within the community, which makes the policy less responsive to unlocking new services, notably those that support community climate readiness.

To fully realise the Leeds Ambitions, we suggest a more strategic approach to asset management through the adoption of PCPs — one that balances financial constraints with long-term community-led solutions that can address the challenges faced by the city. PCPs can open up new areas for service delivery to make Leeds more resilient and generate an asset base for the civic sector to organise action.

In this policy brief, we introduce the existing CAT approach and make a case for extending and supporting it through the PCP model.

Beyond Community Asset Transfers

Since 2012, reflecting the Localism Act, LCC has implemented a Community Asset Transfer policy (CAT), as a way to transfer the management of council-owned land or buildings to community organisations. These assets are normally transferred through long term leases, where the Council retains ownership, but the community leaseholder takes on a range of new responsibilities in return for access to an asset.

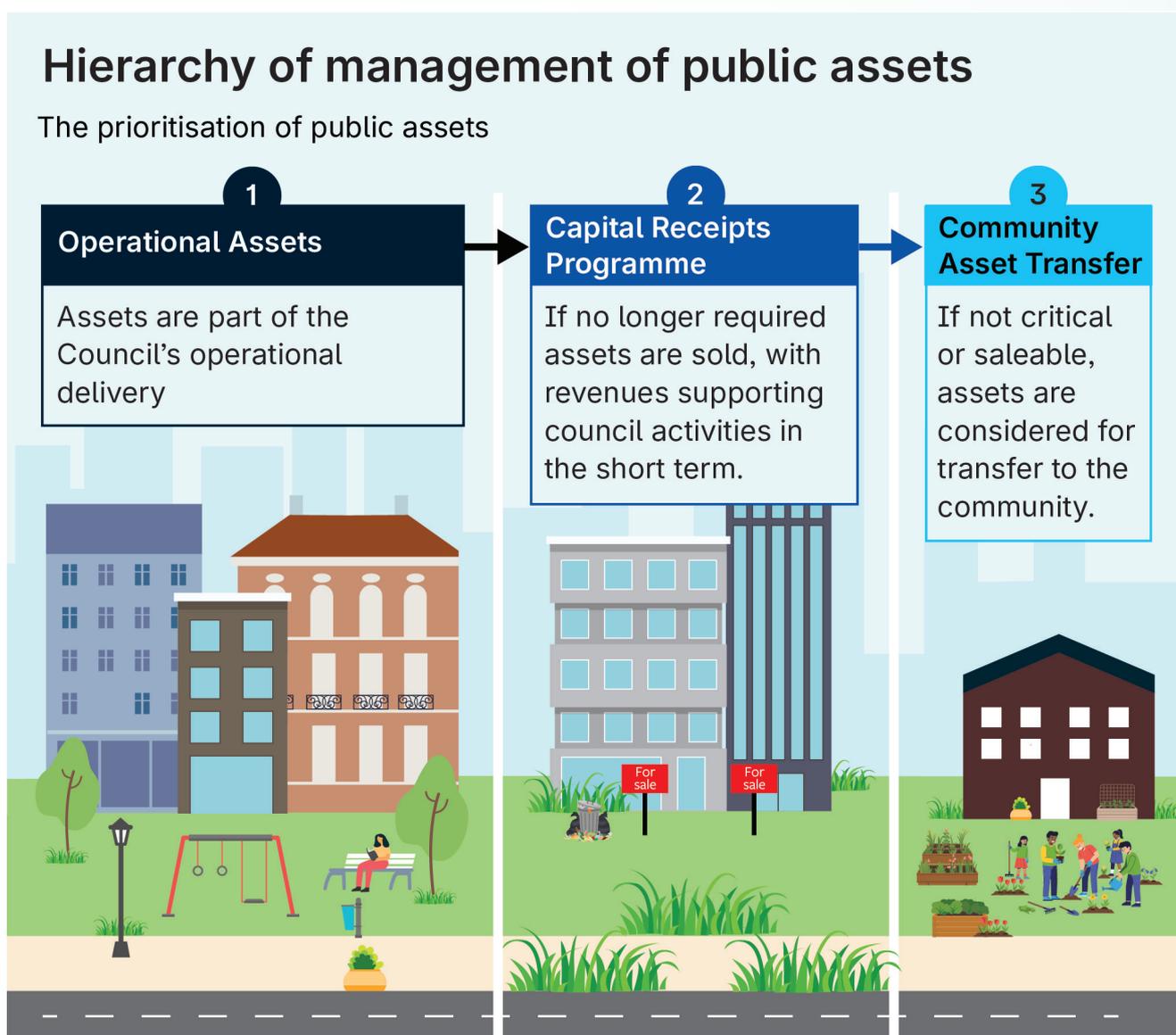


Figure 1. Hierarchy of management of public assets

Operational assets are prioritised with other forms of management considered next, and community assets transfer considered the final option.



While we recognise the unprecedented nature of financial pressures on local authorities, it is increasingly evident that a model of asset management focused on the saleability of assets does not unlock the potential of communities to develop capacities and play a role in tackling city challenges.

We consider the current approach to community asset transfer a residual or last resort model. Through the idea of PCPs we suggest a new, more proactive approach to community-Council partnerships that could form a core part of public asset management and the Team Leeds approach.

With financial pressure growing on local authorities, the current model of asset management risks exhausting LCC's portfolio of assets for short term benefits, whereas PCPs could ensure their longer-term preservation and transformation.

The role of communities in asset management

LCC's [Estate Management strategy \(pdf\)](#) sets out the overarching principles which guides the future planning, use and management of the public property portfolio to meet the City and the Council's aspirations in the coming years.' (p.9).

These guiding principles of asset management for the city are:

- a modern fit for purpose estate
- a well-managed and maintained estate
- working with partners
- maximising income from the portfolio
- supporting the city's future

Leeds' approach to estate management specifies that public assets will be used to

support the Leeds Four Ambitions: health and wellbeing, inclusive growth, strong communities and a sustainable city.

Engaging with partners is one important approach to achieving these ambitions, and while private partners can provide necessary financial and investment support, community partners also play an integral role in meeting them. Public assets are primarily used by LCC to deliver their statutory services. They play a vital role in ensuring the wellbeing of its residents. Residents also provide vital knowledge in the use of these assets, as they are well placed to know which statutory services are needed in their area and where there are gaps in provision.

Moreover, the new CAT policy (adopted July 2024) stipulates that: "CAT is typically a means for charities and social enterprises to support local communities by making the case for taking over a building or land where services or activities have been provided within a local community, either historically or in the present" (p.1). Further, it states that CAT might be considered if, "the asset has a recent history of delivering services or activities to the local community and it can be demonstrated that there remains a need for those services and activities to continue" (p.2). These conditions increase responsiveness to community needs but also make it difficult for community groups to come forward with new ideas to help the Council meet its ambitions.

What is apparent is that there are an increasing number of civic groups who are requesting access to public assets to help meet city ambitions. Without a clear framework for PCPs, LCC is likely to miss out on harnessing their potential.

Why Leeds needs to develop Public-Civic Partnerships

What are Public-Civic Partnerships?

“PCPs are models of joint ownership and governance, in which the two principle parties are a state agent (such as a municipal council) and a Common Association (such as a cooperative or community interest company).” (Milburn and Russel, 2020. p.145)

Public-Civic Partnerships (PCPs) are a way for the local state and civil society to co-create, co-manage and co-own public resources and/or assets together.

The ‘c’ normally refers to ‘civic’, but it can also refer to the idea of the community or commons. All these share similarities in that

they focus on people and groups outside the formal state and business. PCPs exist on a spectrum in terms of public and community ownership (Figure 2).

PCPs are growing in popularity as an alternative to the public-private partnership (PPP) model which emerged in the 1990s and has been criticised for prioritising private interests over public need. While PPPs delivered many useful assets, they have also left local authorities and communities with a legacy of debt and a lack of accountability over how assets are managed.

PCPs can also be considered as part of the wider move towards community wealth building, which mobilises the collaborative power of local anchor institutions to increase local prosperity.

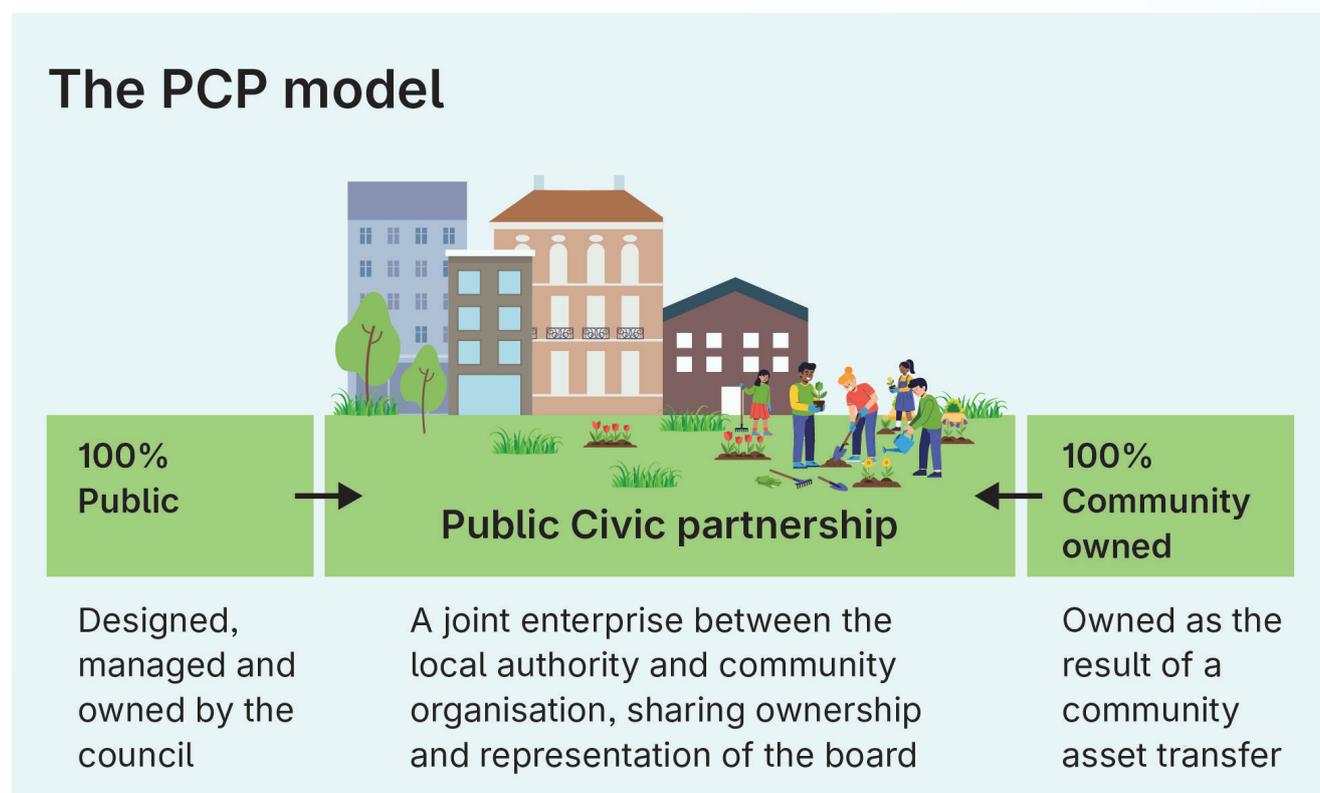


Figure 2. The Public Civic Partnership model.

Model of asset ownership and management where the local authority and community groups partner.



PCPs represent a change in approach where greater trust is developed with community and civic groups as equal partners who can play a key role in developing local wellbeing and prosperity. Rather than the local state only relying on private business for innovation and creativity, through a community wealth building lens, civic and community partners are seen as part of the entrepreneurial mix of actors that can help deliver place priorities. In an age of mounting crises and continuing fiscal constraint, this greater role for civic and community partners has the potential to open significant new resources and capacities.

“To tackle climate change and fight fuel poverty, Plymouth City Council worked in collaboration with the local community to establish the Plymouth Energy Community (PEC). This organization, owned by the community and run for the community, seeks to increase local ownership of energy infrastructure and undertakes projects to support households that are excluded from the energy system through fuel poverty. PEC operates through a mix of community share funding, grants and external loans, with any profits flowing back into the community. Plymouth has become a true pioneer in the municipal energy transition, specifically in how local authorities can work with and nurture community efforts to improve energy efficiency and address social issues. Most importantly, PEC encourages residents to take charge of building a just city fit for future needs.” *Justin Bear, Plymouth Energy Community*

PCPs can take a variety of forms, from a partnership over a piece of underused land

where a community group will be developing a nature recovery project, to a green energy company (see examples on pp.10-13).

PCPs normally operate as a joint enterprise between the local authority and community organisation, sharing ownership and representation of the board.

Why PCPs? The potential of Public-Civic Partnerships

Traditional models of public asset management are often state-led and top-down, where local, regional or national statutory actors have the sole responsibility as the main accountability partner for public assets. PCPs broaden the debate about the stewardship of public goods and offer a pathway towards the transformation of the local state without undermining public action.

Importantly, there is a broader national shift towards the devolution of power based on a more equitable relationship between state and local communities where a range of civic actors help co-manage and steward the public assets on which they rely on.

Empowering local communities and civic actors to play a greater role in public assets is a win-win. Given challenges around financial austerity and job losses, local authorities can benefit from managing their portfolio of public assets with civic partners.

“Public-community collaborations are not about extra financial burden for local governments but represent a long-term investment for long-lasting values. Moreover, such partnerships can be self-sustained and self-extended when financing is well designed. Starting with local authorities’ ability to capitalise on

financial resources, it is possible to develop locally owned and managed profit-generating infrastructure. These profits are reinvested into projects designed for the benefit of the local communities.” *Transnational Institute, “Democratic and collective ownership of public goods and services” p.6*

In recent years, local authorities have increasingly recognised the value of the civic and third sector. To preserve essential services in the face of cuts to frontline budgets, many authorities have transferred a significant number of these to civic partners. This sector is often praised for its close connection to the communities it serves, its agility, and its ability to reach out to communities that may have a difficult relationship with the local state. However, the third sector is also more fragile and heavily dependent on recurring funding.

Therefore, whilst financial austerity is an incentive to develop PCPs, the model presents a range of further in-built advantages that positively transform the relationship between the local authority and its residents.

Some of these advantages include:

- **Financial:** Alleviating financial pressures on the local authority, whilst maintaining public assets in public hands; allowing the local authority to use some of the skills and resources present within the community and third sector to further implement core policies.
- **Democratic:** Re-empowering communities to feel a sense of ownership over the city in which they live; to further support a sense that the Council is working for the interests of the community and improve the relationship between

residents and their local authority.

- **Skills and capacities:** Including citizen knowledge and skills in public action. Widening knowledge and skills offers the potential to include a broader set of voices, perspectives and abilities into LCC’s actions.

The PCP model shows that the local state can collaborate effectively with civic groups to harness the strengths of both. **When well-designed and adequately funded, this model can provide mutually reinforcing benefits for local authorities and community groups.** This type of collaboration is particularly well suited to tackle significant challenges that affect the city, such as climate change, nature recovery and food security.



Case studies of successful PCPs

Table 1. Opportunities for potential PCPs in Leeds by directorate.

Council directorate	Opportunity for using PCP model	Example
Asset management - assets to be retained	Partnership with third sector groups will allow LCC to retain its assets, whilst reducing the costs associated with management. Or, if an asset needs to be disposed of, it can be transferred to a community group whose activities will provide high social and/or environmental value, as well as an income stream.	See case studies one and two
Asset management - assets to be disposed	If a piece of land or a building has been identified for disposal, it can take a long time until it is redeveloped. Meanwhile use can allow amazing initiatives to flourish such as (but not limited to), cultural events, initiatives supporting biodiversity or urban food growing.	See case studies three and four
Green spaces	<p>Parks, ginnels and woodlands in Leeds present opportunities for partnerships. Some structures such as 'Friends of Groups' already exist, but they are not always inclusive or representative.</p> <p>Parks and greens spaces need to serve a wide variety of people: nature-led projects or initiatives have good potential for building a sense of community.</p>	See case study five
Housing	Pieces of marginal land, such as grassland between housing, represent opportunities for residents to develop their sense of community, engagement and stewardship.	See case studies six and seven
Highways	Some pieces of marginal land e.g. grass verges, traffic islands or road sides present opportunities for community-led projects. Although the risks and constraints are high, Highways' marginal land is very visible, which can be useful to communicate issues such as nature recovery. It is also spread geographically across all communities in Leeds.	See case study eight

1: Plymouth Energy Community (Plymouth)

In 2013, Plymouth City Council (PCC) set up Plymouth Energy Community (PEC) to tackle growing energy poverty in a city battling with the erosion of its economy and impact of austerity cuts. The context meant that the Council had no other choice but to partner with communities to come up with a viable solution.

PCC supported the initiative in various forms, including Council Officers' expertise, a start-up loan and a grant. PEC was formalised in 2013 using a social enterprise model, with the mission 'to empower our community to create a fair, affordable, low-carbon energy system with local people at its heart' (*plymouthenergycommunity.com*). PEC Renewables was created in 2014. This sister organisation's mission was to develop the infrastructure necessary for the development of a community-owned renewable energy company. The infrastructure is financed by loans and community shares are issued to the local residents starting at share prices as low as £50.

So far, this dual financial model has supported the creation of 33 community-owned solar arrays, installed on the roofs of 21 schools and community organisations.

In 2016, a partnership between PEC and the local economic development trust resulted in the creation of Four Greens Community Trust (FGCT), which turned derelict land into a community asset, building solar panels producing 4 MW capable of powering 1000 homes. This project, called Ernesettle solar farm, has been funded by around 520 investors who raised a total of £2.4 million in community shares. Some of the profit generated by this solar farm is used to support community projects including a local allotment.

PEC is a demonstration that an alliance between communities and their local Council can create the potential for locally-owned energy infrastructures, keeping money paid towards energy bills in the local economy and reinvesting in community projects. PEC's surplus profits are expected to reach around £1.5 million, which supports energy poverty reduction projects. Using the same financial strategy, PEC is investing in genuinely affordable housing for

Plymouth's residents.

2: Northern Roots (Oldham, Greater Manchester)

Initiated by Oldham Council, this pioneering project will create the UK's largest urban farm and eco-park on 160 acres of green space. The land is owned by Oldham Council but the management has been signed over to Northern Roots charity through a lease. The site is situated on the green belt, which means that the scheme has received planning permission, but needs approval from the Secretary of State.

The aim is to develop Northern Roots in a way that creates jobs, skills, and business opportunities for local people while preserving and enhancing the biodiversity and ecological value of the site. It supports Oldham Council's plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 and contributes to targets set out in Greater Manchester's Five-Year Environment Plan. Part of the development plan is to generate renewable energy on-site to create income for the project and/or contribute to the operation of the site.

3: Shieldfield Wheatfield (Newcastle)



Shieldfield Wheatfield was born in 2018 from a collaboration between Mikey Tomkins, urban food growing consultant, and the organisation Shieldfield Art Works. Its aim was to grow urban wheat in Shieldfield, Newcastle. Wheat is not a usual urban crop because it requires



a significant amount of land to grow. However, due to the availability of seven sites in the neighbourhood and motivated by the opening of a local bakery, the residents decided to attempt growing wheat. Mikey Tomkins estimated that one square meter would produce 500g of flour, enough for one big loaf. 12sq meters of wheat were planted in total. The crops were uneven across sites, with some plots producing heaving crops and others being decimated by pigeons during lockdown. The wheat was harvested in August producing 1.5kgs of flour, which was quite an achievement considering that the country went into lockdown a few days after the wheat was planted! It was milled at a local bakery, and baked into bread in October.

The project triggered community engagement and stimulated a lot of curiosity around urban food growing. Although wheat is hard work, bread is a universal language of food and conviviality. Wheat is also a seasonal crop, which has great potential for growing on plots that are temporarily disused. It can also easily grow between buildings or on marginal plots of land.

4: Imagine Leeds (Leeds)

In 2023, Climate Action Leeds opened the first climate action hub in Leeds City centre. Speakers included Alex Sobel, who was then MP for Leeds North West and Shadow Minister for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Tom Riordan, former Chief Executive of LCC; Andy Goldring, City Hub Lead at Climate Action Leeds; Professor Nick Plant, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation at University of Leeds, and Hannah Bailey, Chief Officer at Voluntary Action Leeds. Previously located on the seventh floor of City Exchange, Imagine Leeds has now moved to a location on the University of Leeds campus. The hub offers learning and working spaces and acts as the base for Climate Action Leeds, the citywide, community-led movement working for a zero carbon, nature friendly, socially just Leeds by the 2030s. Climate Action Leeds is a five year collaborative programme involving a large network across the city, which started in October 2020 and is funded by the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund.

5: The Friends of Gledhow Valley Woods (FGVW, Leeds)

FGVW was originally created in 1996 to perform basic maintenance tasks (such as litter picking, bulb planting, etc) to enhance Gledhow Valley Woods. As the tasks which the FGVW undertook mirrored the responsibilities of LCC (who manages the land) and improved the asset of Wades Charity (the land owner), they were able to obtain physical resources (litter pickers, bulbs, seeds), funding (discreet grants from Wades which allowed the purchase of path stone) and assistance/advice from LCC (collection of rubbish cleared at monthly action mornings, moving fallen trees to areas to prevent car access to the woods, etc).

As the local community recognised the benefit of their input, more volunteers joined them and allowed more ambitious tasks to be undertaken. A good example is a footpath alongside Gledhow Beck to Gledhow Lake so that the woods became more accessible (parents with young children, people with mobility issues, etc).

Any 'Friends Of' group must consider whether their aims reflect the aspirations of the local community. What someone feels is a benefit may detract from someone else's enjoyment of a resource. Engagement with the local community is pivotal to the success of a group (social media is a useful tool to achieve this). Projects should also be evaluated for the long term. The planting of hedgerows in GVV is a good example. Whilst it is great for biodiversity and aesthetics, there will also be an ongoing responsibility to manage these hedgerows.

6: Cross Green Growing Together – CGGT (Leeds)



CGGT grew out of a weekly gardening group which started in 2014 and was ran by Hyde Park Source (HPS) in partnership with a local

resident's association.

LCC were focused on this area for rejuvenation, with significant investment in housing stock. They had an old garage site that was a problem due to fly tipping and, being next to a railway embankment was unsuitable for development. They approached the gardening group/HPS to develop the site into a bigger gardening project. LCC proactively offered HPS a 10 year lease for the site.

The long-term vision was for CGGT to become registered as a charity and to take on the lease of the land themselves. This is now happening, alongside the creation of a community hub building set in the well-developed community garden. HPS has also developed part of the site as their permanent workshop for their Design & Build project, under a separate lease.

7: Seacroft Forest Garden (Leeds)

Seacroft Forest Garden (SFG) started in 2021 when some local residents identified unused land situated behind Housing Leeds properties in Seacroft. Climate Action Seacroft (CAS) helped to incubate this project, and brought in HPS to provide design support. A business case was presented to Housing Asset Management with the support of Climate Action Seacroft. This helped to remove the barriers that could have stopped the volunteers accessing the land.

For the first 12-18 months of the project, access was only enabled through the presence of a member of LCC staff, as the project developed and trust was built, this arrangement was extended with limited access granted at specified times. Having a trusted and experienced organisations like HPS involved gave LCC the confidence that the project was developed and run in a safe and effective way.

The project is now well established, with HPS granted a 'license for activity' on the site and then developing a partnership agreement between SFG and HPS to guide the ongoing development of the project.

The license is at a peppercorn rate after HPS made the case based on savings to LCC in maintenance costs, alongside the social impact. LCC agreed to waive the rent in recognition of the improvements made to the site,

which are estimated to be in excess of £50k.

8: Wildflower planted by Wildlife Friendly Otley (Leeds)

As part of Otley's Nature Recovery Plan, Wildlife Friendly Otley and its volunteers transformed a 429 m² roadside verge between Otley and Pool by sowing native wildflower seeds. The project, approved and licensed by Highways and LCC, aims to enhance habitat corridors that allow wildlife to move more freely around the town. Located along Pool Road, one of Otley's main entry routes, the planting represents the first phase in a wider effort to establish wildflower corridors along all approaches to the town, strengthening local biodiversity and contributing to long-term nature recovery.





Developing PCPs in Leeds: key findings and recommendations

The starting point of the research behind this document was that PCPs can better support public assets to allow the city to achieve its goals. Based on our conversation with third sector groups and Council partners, we have identified four areas of action that would significantly improve PCPs and therefore enhance the Council's ability to capture the skills of community members and value(s) that community initiatives create.

Below we outline our key recommendations to take forward the PCP agenda within LCC.

Recommendation 1: The City Development Directorate develops an approach for the use of meanwhile or temporary partnerships for disused land or buildings listed for disposal.

Leeds City Council does not yet have a policy or guidance that informs the practice around the meanwhile use of assets. As a result, many initiatives are not realised, and their potential benefits are not delivered to the community.

Meanwhile use has a long track record as a successful strategy in supporting vibrant and creative urban redevelopments in landmark cities such as Bristol, London, Berlin and Geneva. In Leeds, it has been successfully used by East Street Arts and is advocated for in the Local Plan Update. Meanwhile uses have the potential to offer space for community-led initiatives supporting biodiversity, urban food growing, education and the arts.

The map below is the result of a series of community-based walks conducted by community land mapping consultant Mikey Tomkins in Seacroft and Alwoodley in 2024, as part of the research that this document draws from. They show the potential to map meanwhile uses at a

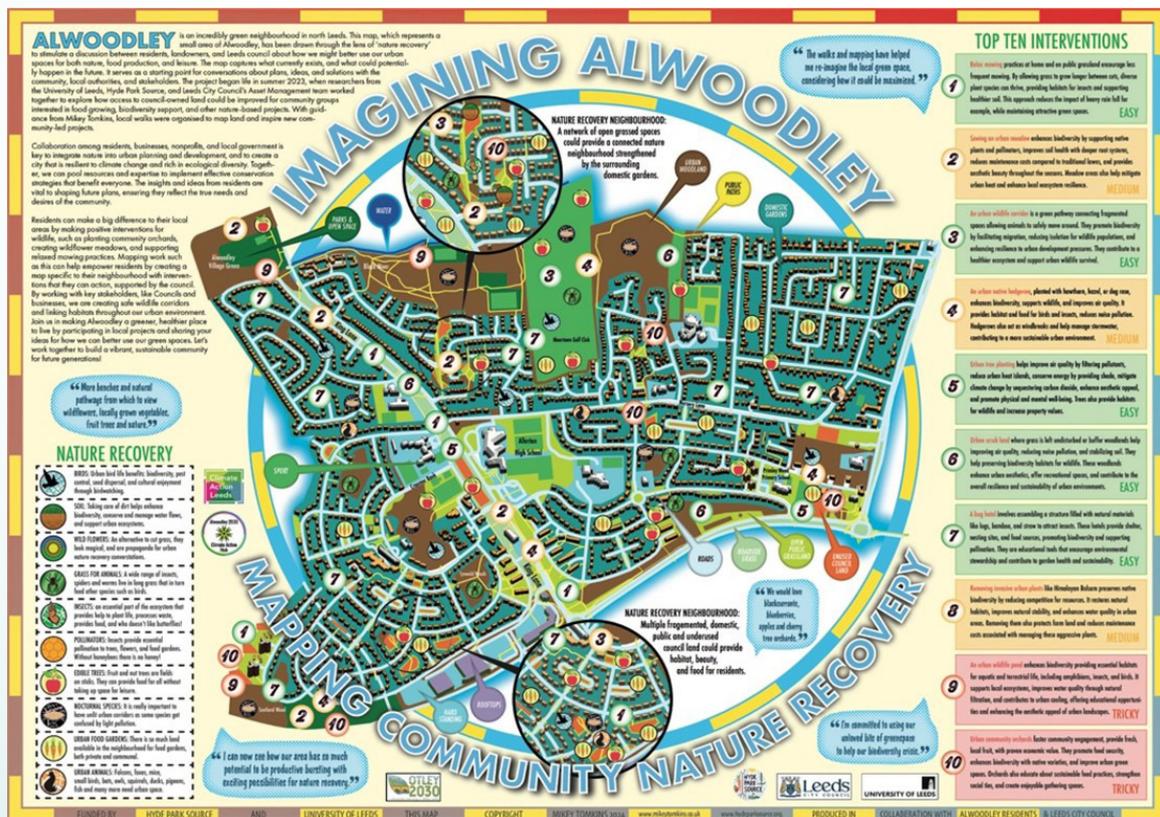


Figure 3. A map for community-led nature recovery in Leeds, Mikey Tomkins, 2024

community level.

Recommendation 2. The Asset Management and Regeneration service streamlines the partnership process by standardising leases and licenses

LCC is a significant landlord, and its assets are managed across a variety of directorates, which complicates the creation of civic partnerships. Often, partnerships are developed on an ad-hoc basis, documents are developed from scratch, and the process is lengthy and resource intensive. Our recommendation is that Asset Management leads on standardising leases and licenses for civic use across Council directorates.

During the research process that underpins this document, Asset Management has been identified as the most logical single-entry contact within the Council to triage and act as the first contact with civic/community groups

interested in partnering with LCC. This contact could be run in collaboration with a trusted civic/anchor partner, with funds sought to develop a PCP service gateway.

Recommendation 3: LCC develops a framework for PCPs

In the longer term, our recommendation is that LCC creates a new policy that has a broader scope for how public assets can be managed in partnership with civic groups. This process could begin through a consultation that eventually leads to a proposal to full Council, and championed by a councillor from the executive member team. A PCP policy would stress how LCC can capture the longer-term social value of an initiative and which establishes communities as equal partners in delivering the Best City Leeds Ambitions – similar to Lambeth’s Voluntary and Community Sector Asset Strategy (see below).

To support the ambitions of Team Leeds, this

Lambeth’s Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Asset Strategy

In 2021, Lambeth introduced a policy that uses the Borough’s assets to support community and Third Sector organisations working towards the city’s ambitions:

“This proposal addresses the core VCS portfolio of approximately 49 properties totaling approximately 85,000 sq. ft. of accommodation; these are listed at Appendix 1. The proposal seeks to adopt a letting policy which will support a sustainable model for funding future repairs to premises whilst also encouraging well utilised spaces delivering services and activities aligned with the objectives of the Borough Plan. The letting policy will be underpinned by the introduction of a social value process and supported by a new VCS assets liaison officer. The policy includes the adoption of a standardised VCS subsidised rent matrix that recognises differences in location and size of premises across the portfolio. This policy replaces the Council’s community asset transfer policy.”

Lambeth’s Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Asset Strategy, 2021, p.1



framework should aim to complement the CAT policy by offering an alternative to disposal that allows LCC to retain the value of an asset while supporting the work of the third and community sector in delivering public services for public good. This framework would need to:

- Work collaboratively with community groups to identify needs in terms of infrastructure and services to tackle current issues in the city; where relevant, envision how a PCP could be a model to develop these infrastructure and services collaboratively with communities.
- Acknowledge the value of the third sector as rooted in communities, and work closer to their needs to recognise that they can help LCC deliver essential services and meet targets if assets are managed in partnership.
- Aim to reduce the distance between the public sector, third sector and local communities, through opportunities that increase collaboration, teamwork and trust.
- Rebalance the relations between the public, private and civic sectors in terms of asset management.
- Be rooted in community-wealth building approaches.

Recommendation 4: trial the PCP model as part of the Team Leeds approach

Beyond operational issues, PCPs offer an opportunity to reinvigorate local democratic practice. Through a novel and proactive use of assets, LCC can build capacity to retain and build assets that can respond to new challenges by opening up new activity areas. Through PCPs, assets are proactively used together by LCC and communities to meet Leeds Ambitions rather than CAT being seen as a last resort if it is not usable or suitable for disposal.

As we show in the Examples, Leeds already operates a number of successful PCPs which forms the basis of an emerging framework.

Leeds is also home to an emerging network of pioneering groups such as Leeds Community Energy, Leeds Community Homes and Leeds Community Spaces, a network of community climate action hubs through Climate Action Leeds, as well as active community space developers such as East Street Arts and Slung Low that could act as test beds for future PCPs.

Funding

One of the key issues to begin this process is funding. LCC, along with civic partners, could apply for national funds to begin forming PCPs – to support service design, allocate staff time, and ring fence specific assets to test the delivery model. Equally, a windfall dividend from current high levels of city development could be used to pump prime PCPs, to rebalance civic activity with the high current levels of private investment.

The research behind this document

This policy briefing is the result of a collaborative research project at the University of Leeds funded by the Policy Support Fund (PSF) called 'Developing a pathway towards urban co-production for disused land in Leeds'. Its aim was to explore how **community groups and third sector organisations could better access public land and assets**. The project was based around two propositions. First, Leeds is home to many community initiatives who are trying to seek access to public land to develop projects focused on (but not limited to) community gardening, outdoor provision and mental health, urban food growing, biodiversity, nature recovery, climate transition and energy. Second, access to public land is complex, which not only is a source of frustration for community groups, but adds to pressure on the local authority and undermines the delivery of projects with potential benefits for both the community and LCC.

This project draws from evidence of the central role played by community initiatives to respond to social and environmental challenges in Leeds and beyond. Funded through the PSF at the University of Leeds, it explores community action and public assets through the four

pillars of Leeds Ambitions, namely health and wellbeing, communities, inclusive growth and creating a sustainable city, to envision a model of Asset Management in **which communities would support the Council in achieving these goals.**

Using co-production as a research framework, this project brought together **Hyde Park Source**, a local third sector organisation active in nature-based projects, **Leeds City Council's Asset Management Team** and academics at the **University of Leeds**.

This work mapped existing community-led projects on public land in Leeds, and the processes and documents that guided them. The research included all physical assets (land as well as buildings). This is important as both land and buildings are key assets for communities that can be mobilised to meet city ambitions.

Our starting point began with an interest in land, before being expanded to include buildings to explore how both could be mobilised through new public-community partnerships.

The context of the research was framed by the unprecedented financial and staffing pressures on local authorities. The co-production approach can offer benefits here, in terms of a model of asset management that **can facilitate and upscale community initiatives**, enhance the already productive relationships between LCC and community groups, and offer value for money in a time of austerity.

Public assets represent powerful and tangible resources, which a local authority and residents can jointly utilise to tackle their collective challenges and aspirations. This is where PCPs come in - **a model of co-produced public assets in which public bodies and grassroots organisations share power and ownership to collectively address city challenges, to find cost effective and more durable solutions.**

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About the authors

Marie-Avril Berthet
Research Fellow
Sustainability Research Institute - University
of Leeds

Paul Chatterton
Professor of Urban Futures
School of Geography - University of Leeds

Pete Tatham
Project Coordinator
Hyde Park Source

Rebecca Brunk
Positive Impact Partners programme -
Sustainability Project Officer
Sustainability Services - University of Leeds

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