

# GEMS Future Parks Accelerator

Pioneering Community Businesses  
in Parks Case Study

July 2022

**SERI**   
Informing Policy and Decision Makers

The Pioneering Community Businesses in Parks (PCBP) initiative forms part of Plymouth City Council's (PCC) Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) programme, which aims to transform the way that green spaces in Plymouth are managed and cared for to ensure their future sustainability. PCBP aimed to create and develop more enterprising, community led activity in parks to support their financial, social, and environmental sustainability.

PCBP was delivered by PCC and Real Ideas, a partner in the FPA programme that works with individuals and organisations to harness the power of social enterprise to deliver real and lasting social change, between April 2021 and July 2022. PCBP demonstrates the value of working with community businesses for local authorities and landowners, for the benefits they can bring financially, environmentally, and socially for parks and green spaces. This case study outlines the aspirations for PCBP, the work undertaken, the key outcomes and impacts of this work, and recommendations for others who may be embarking on something similar.

## What are community businesses?

PCBP used Power to Change's definition of a community business:

- Locally rooted
- Accountable to the local community
- Trades for the benefit of the locally community
- Has broad community impact

## Headline impacts

- **10 community businesses supported**, including more established and larger scale enterprises. This includes Snapdragons, who have taken on a 700m<sup>2</sup> site in Victoria Park, and Pollenize, who are working with community businesses across the city to create a network of pollinator habitats.
- **7 new enterprise projects seeded or started during PCBP**, including Stiltskin Soapbox Theatre, who expanded their outdoor theatre offer, and Hamoaze House, who introduced an ice cream truck serving Mount Wise Park.
- **Development pipeline of community enterprises and projects:** Plymouth Pie Club, Yoga Loft, Food Plymouth, and Be:Unique Wellbeing and Fitness are all hoping to add community offers within the next six months in Devonport and Stonehouse parks.
- These businesses are growing the local economy, trading with one another, and creating jobs, with **5 additional FTEs** introduced.
- They are taking on and transforming land and buildings in partnership with PCC. There have been **5 asset transfers (lease and licences)**, with another in development.
- This work provided a platform to bring in additional funding for wider economic impact: **£200,000 was secured for the 10 community businesses and £102,000 worth of staff time** to provide infrastructure support from Real Ideas through ERDF grant (Green Minds).
- Enterprises are embedded within and working for their communities, with over **200 active volunteers** from some of the most deprived neighbourhoods, and **500 people engaged through free events and activities**.
- **10 businesses are introducing natural improvements and reducing impacts.** This includes wildlife ponds, native hedge and tree planting, and community composting.
- The profile and influence of the work is supported through webinars, events, and articles. Real Ideas ran seminars and events, attended by over 200 people, and published 4 articles and think pieces, discussing and promoting community business in parks.
- Creation of the new Resource Hub has provided a central resource for current and future tools and resources.

### Aspirations for PCBP

PCBP builds on the Enrich Programme, a one-year programme of work delivered by Real Ideas and PCC during the Co-design Phase of the FPA programme. Enrich brought together experts from across social enterprise sectors and council departments to explore how greater social enterprise thinking activity could be brought to parks and green spaces to bring about financial, environmental, and social benefits. Through this programme, participants collectively identified areas for development to kick-start new and greater community business activity in parks.

The focus of PCBP was on putting these recommendations into practice to generate learning about what works in creating more enterprising activity in parks; to understand the financial, social, and environmental benefits; and to create examples of good practice for others to follow.

*“It takes forward those high level, shared ideas into something that is practical and impactful.”*

*Real Ideas Project Manager*

*“It’s about enabling social enterprise to flourish in parks, to meet the FPA vision.”*

*FPA Project Manager*

It was hoped that this work would also develop strengthened networks of businesses and groups who could support one another; raise the profile of opportunities that exist for enterprise in parks; bring other voices into decisions around management of parks; and bring new audiences into parks, all of which can support sustainable management of parks and greenspaces.

*“We’ll have raised the profile through the social enterprise network around the opportunities that parks can offer.”*

*FPA Project Manager*

*“It’s a way of bringing other voices into decisions around what’s best for the park in that community, as well as thinking about financial sustainability.”*

*FPA Project Manager*

### Putting it into practice

Work under the PCBP initiative was focussed on three key areas: bringing together community businesses and groups based in parks to collectively create more enterprising activity; supporting enterprising activity in parks through the use of assets; and development of a resource hub to provide information and materials for communities and landowners interested in social enterprise in parks and green spaces.

#### How sites and assets included in PCBP were chosen:

**A focussed approach:** PCBP was piloted in three parks, rather than city wide, to enable the team to focus their energy to achieve action within the short timeframe available. The three chosen parks were Devonport Park, Victoria Park, and Central Park.

**Going where the energy is:** The three parks already had active groups and community businesses “doing great things in these spaces,” on which PCBP could capitalise and build on. Similarly, the team focussed on assets where there was already community interest, but where extra support was needed to get ideas off the ground. This included assets in natural spaces outside of the three initial parks.

**Leveraging relationships:** Real Ideas had pre-existing relationships with many of the community businesses in Victoria and Devonport Park, helping to progress the work.

**Considering wider strategic priorities:** Central Park was chosen as it is a strategic city green space, which is a key focus of development for PCC.

There were four planned key phases to the work, as outlined in Figure 1 overleaf. These were mapping and defining activity; developing the approach and a plan of action; implementation; and embedding the legacy of PCBP.

A budget of £2,000 was allocated to each park, to support participants to create sustainable, enterprising activity that addressed social and environmental issues within the space, ideally delivered through a shared project.

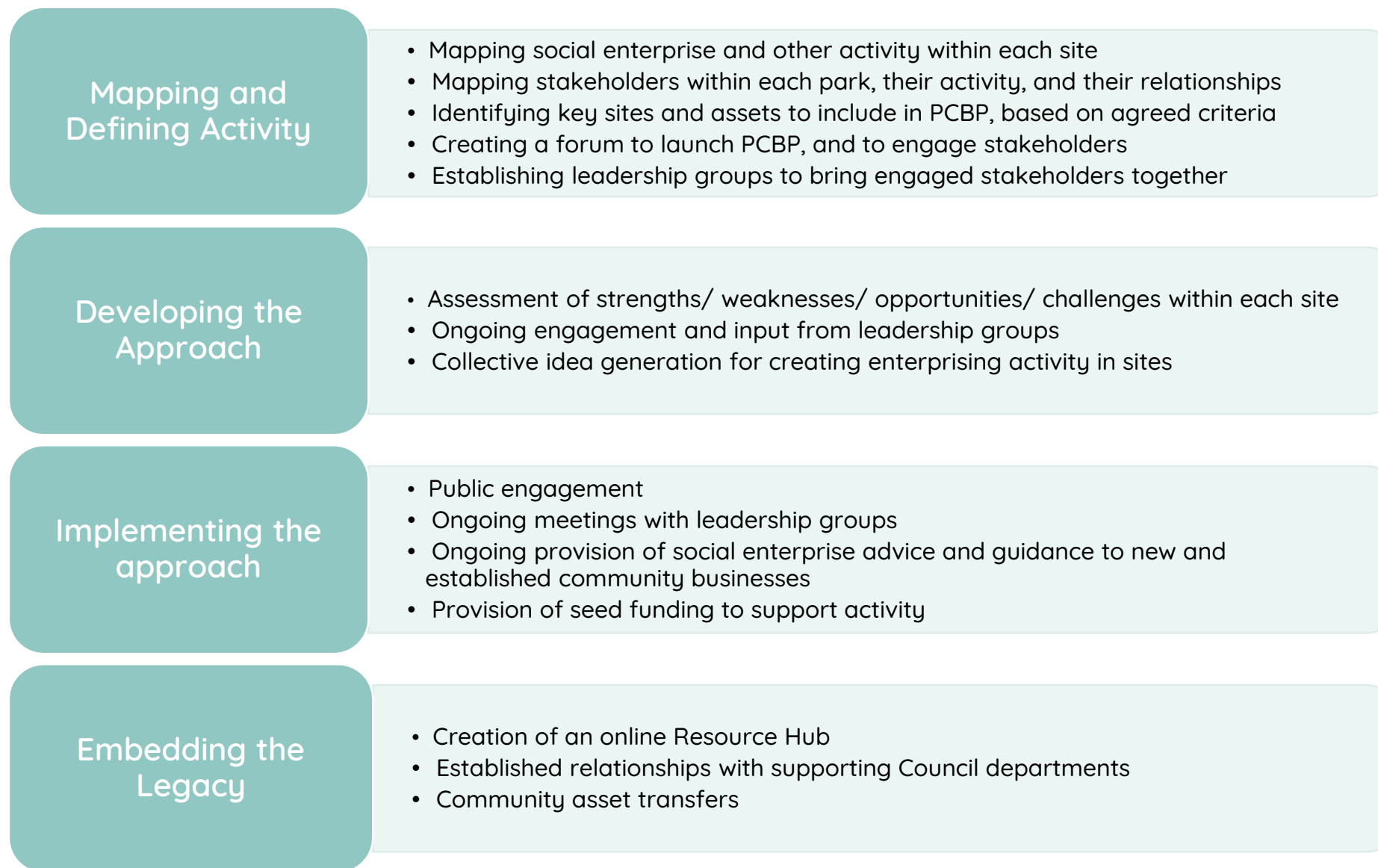


Figure 1: Key Phases of the PCBP Programme



### The outcomes and impacts of PCBP

#### Victoria Park

##### **Support through the planning process**

Snapdragons, a Community Interest Company, had recently taken on the lease of a disused bowling green and building. Snapdragons was provided with support through the planning application process, to enable them to carry out improvements to develop the site to provide forest school activities. Their application was successful and work to develop the site is currently ongoing.

This process opened up conversations between the PCC FPA team and PCC's Planning team, helping the planning team to recognise the challenges that community businesses face in navigating the planning system. This has resulted in the development of simple guidance materials which will support other community businesses in the future, as well as a reduced fee for pre-application inquiries for community businesses. The guidance includes information on the rationale for planning requirements, how to navigate the application process, and signposting to free advice and support.



##### **Trialling multi-use of changing rooms**

The mapping process identified underutilisation of the park changing room block, limited to weekend use by football teams. Engagement with the park leadership group identified interest from the Friends of Victoria Park group to use it as a storage space for events and gardening equipment, as well as interest from a local health and wellbeing business, Be:Unique, to use it as a base to set up outdoor fitness sessions in the park. After negotiation with the football club regarding requirements, PCC worked with Real Ideas to draw up licences for both the Friends group and Be:Unique to have a permanent locked room within the building. This has supported Be:Unique to expand their business offer, reach new customers, and helped bring new users to the park. This is explored in more detail in the feature case study.

The success of this pilot has led to PCC expanding this approach to other areas of the city. For example, in the north of the city where investment has already been made into high quality football pitches, with a requirement to provide changing rooms, PCC is working in partnership to explore the reconfiguration of a community centre to accommodate football changing. This both enables access to a wider range of funding sources as well as minimising pressure on the service to build new facilities without long term maintenance funding in place.

#### Devonport Park

##### **Supporting joint stewardship**

In Devonport Park, considerable progress was made in establishing a leadership group for the park. Although initially slow to establish and experiencing a degree of conflict, owing to poor existing relationships between some of the stakeholders, the group were able to work through this with the support of Real Ideas. They identified collective aspirations to use the bandstand, which was underutilised, to benefit their own businesses/ groups, the park, and local communities. This provided an opportunity to *“test collective management of an asset in the park.”*

This has resulted in a proposal being submitted to PCC for several community business and groups within Devonport Park to take on management of the bandstand, with the ability to use it to support events and, through charging for use, generate income for its ongoing maintenance.

Key to achieving this was improving relationships between stakeholders, and understanding the skills and capacity of each to determine roles they could and wanted to take on in relation to management of the bandstand. Routeways, a larger organisation within the park, have agreed to provide a booking system for the bandstand; bookings will be managed by Devonport Park Café, and the Friends of Devonport Park group will be responsible for its ongoing maintenance. This has the potential to support more enterprising activity and income generation, and help to bring new users to the park.

### **Central Park**

In Central Park, the mapping process identified larger and more established community businesses, which did not require the same level of support from Real Ideas as community businesses in other sites. A different approach was thus taken, with the PCC FPA team working closely with two key organisations in the park: Fully Catered and Argyle Community Trust.

### **Trialling models that ring fence income back into park maintenance and improvements**

**Fully Catered** run the Meadow Café in Central Park through a partnership agreement with PCC, which means both have a vested interest in making it a success. The PCBP model allowed the team to work more closely with Fully Catered to explore how to maximise the financial, social, and environmental value of the Café. Combining these three elements has led to a number of benefits.

**Social value:** Responding to customer feedback, the catering offer was revised to a much simpler menu with an affordable pricing aim to attract a wider audience. To support the generation of additional social value, a Chat Bot, akin to an

interactive noticeboard, which provides users with information about the park is being hosted at the Café to enable the Café to act as an information hub for the park.

PCC have trained Café staff with information about the park so they can promote positive use to customers. The Café is also providing space for community group meetings and events, adding further social value to the space.

**Environmental value:** Post-Covid, the partnership also carried out a reconfiguration of the interior to support more natural ventilation and storage space, creating a healthy, safe environment and reducing the requirement for delivery vehicles in the park. The Café provides additional environmental value through its focus on being plastic free and its grass roof, valuable for enhancing biodiversity.

**Financial Value:** The partnership agreed to add 10p to the cost of hot drinks, which generated £5000 in the first year. Working with a school group, ideas were generated as to how best to spend the funds and the options will be put to the local community for final decision. It is expected that this will repeat annually.

The Café has generated a financial surplus, with some of this ring fenced into a sinking fund for the café building. PCC is also looking into the potential for the remainder to be spent on an additional staff member to support ongoing maintenance and community engagement.

### **Community enterprise partnerships as a conduit for new park users and experiences**

Working with **Argyle Community Trust (ACT)** through PCBP has led to ACT taking on management of a newly refurbished building, Central Park Community Sports Hub, through a partnership agreement. Again, this agreement means both organisations have a vested interest in making it work, with a focus on joint working.

Initially, PCC offered a licence to ACT to enable them to embed themselves in the building and park and pilot activities. Over the past two years, there has been significant social value generated through this work, with ACT using the Community Sports Hub as a base for social prescribing projects, running activities for people of all ages



based around sports, the outdoors and nature. This includes hosting dementia cafés, providing training for young people, and establishing a forest school. This work has also resulted in successful joint funding bids and development of a business plan for the building to explore how ACT can support the financial sustainability of the building. In addition, joint working with the FPA team has enabled ACT to learn more about the environment, with learnings beginning to influence business operations, generating additional environmental value

In line with their Community Asset Transfer policy, PCC is now developing a long-term lease arrangement with ACT that is based on the business plan, a shared profit and loss model, and a set of key performance indicators.

### Income generation through events

To further support the generation of income and social value, work has focussed on bringing more events and business trade into the park through use of the events field. The FPA team has developed a partnership agreement with PCC's Events team to develop business in the events field, with income generated ring-fenced to be reinvested in the park. This includes both commercial events and community focussed events. In addition, this has included a focus on ensuring events align with the FPA team's environmental aspirations. For example, ensuring events are plastic free. This has resulted in a model whereby income generated from events is paying for staff to ensure events are run safely and effectively, further helping to reduce pressure on the Green Estates department, with a projected surplus by the end of year three for reinvesting back into the maintenance costs of the events field.



### Additional asset feasibility projects

Keyham Neighbourhood Watch has been supported to undertake a community asset transfer of 'The Shed' in Northdown Crescent Park, to utilise it as a community hub and café to benefit Keyham residents. This has generated social value in supporting provision of established and new community events, as well as providing space for young people. It has also been a catalyst for wider regeneration of the park. Income generated will support ongoing maintenance and improvements to The Shed. This is explored further in the feature case study.

As a result of participating in Enrich, The Village Hub became a Community Benefit Society and now manages an area of Blockhouse Park and property on Stoke high street. These assets have enabled them to secure additional funding, including from The Lottery Community Fund and Power to Change. This funding has enabled them to carry out work to assess and improve the ecological value of the park, as well as to run regular community events and activities. This includes a gardening club, Park Yoga, community rambles, an art club and volunteer sessions. These events and activities have been attended by over 300 residents in the last three months. The additional funding has also enabled them to recruit two part time employees, to coordinate and run community services. Going forward, they are aiming to establish a community centre from which to run their activities.

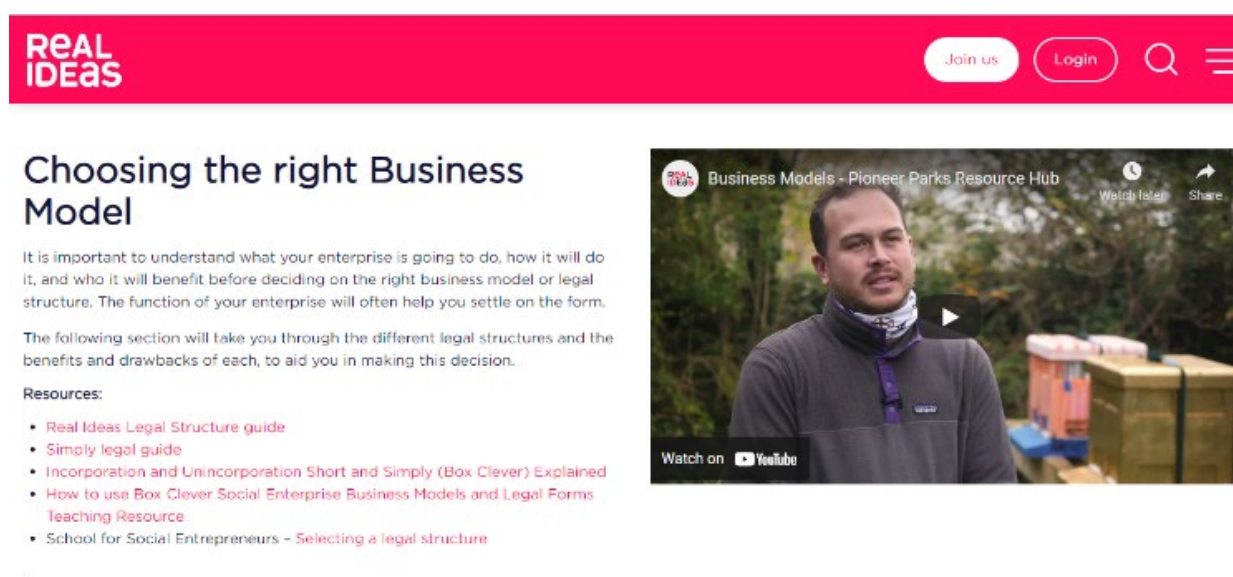
The asset feasibility work has produced several case studies which demonstrate good practice, what is possible, and the benefits of this work. This is invaluable for the PCC FPA team in developing a business case internally to support the adoption of a more strategic approach to managing assets in parks, to drive enterprise and to generate income to support the care of the buildings and associated spaces.

*"We have some really strong examples of what's possible, which will help with some of the fears that surround businesses coming into public spaces and the implications of that."*

*FPA Project Manager*

### The Resource Hub

An online resource hub has been created, consisting of information and tools for those interested in social enterprise in parks and greenspaces, focussing on the benefits of social enterprise in parks; legal structures; funding and finance; community engagement; impact; assets and spaces; the planning process; and business models. These resources are invaluable for both future entrepreneurs and communities who may want to start something in a park, as well as local authorities and landowners who may want to explore social enterprise in a park setting. The Resource Hub can be accessed online at [www.realideas.org/resource-hub](http://www.realideas.org/resource-hub).



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## Choosing the right Business Model

It is important to understand what your enterprise is going to do, how it will do it, and who it will benefit before deciding on the right business model or legal structure. The function of your enterprise will often help you settle on the form.

The following section will take you through the different legal structures and the benefits and drawbacks of each, to aid you in making this decision.

**Resources:**

- Real Ideas Legal Structure guide
- Simply legal guide
- Incorporation and Unincorporation Short and Simply (Box Clever) Explained
- How to use Box Clever Social Enterprise Business Models and Legal Forms Teaching Resource
- School for Social Entrepreneurs - Selecting a legal structure

Business Models - Pioneer Parks Resource Hub Watch later Share

Watch on YouTube



## Recommendations for success

Key learnings have been identified through delivery of the PCBP initiative, providing the following key recommendations for others who want to create and build more enterprising, community led activity in parks and green spaces, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Recommendations for success

### **Understand and respond to local context**

- Taking time to understand your green spaces, enterprises, partners, assets, and available resources and skills is invaluable for informing decisions around where to focus work, what can be achieved within a given timeframe, and how to achieve it.
- Choosing sites where activity was already happening, where there was already interest in utilising an asset, and where relationships were already established, enabled progress to be made faster and benefits realised sooner. This is important for gaining trust and credibility and building relationships within the community business sector.
- This includes being flexible in approach. For example, where a leadership group was not working, it was dropped, and focus shifted to other activity which did have momentum. It is important to adapt to the different contexts of green spaces and the assets and community businesses within them.
- Having this local understanding helped to bring different community businesses and groups together, align them around a shared, helping to drive work forward and support its ongoing sustainability.

### **Work with independent enterprise experts**

Embarking on initiatives like PCBP is difficult for local authorities to do alone; additional independent expertise in developing enterprising activity can benefit by:

- Helping to develop a clear vision and aspirations for the initiative, providing a focus to achieve action and impact;
- Translating this vision when working on the ground to create shared goals between community businesses and other groups;
- Providing additional capacity to support delivery to happen on the ground, from idea generation to implementation;
- Providing credibility to the work, helping to develop relationships and trust with community businesses and groups;
- Providing enterprise support, unpick complexities, network facilitation, and hold the middle ground;

- Providing social enterprise learning to reach a shared enterprise culture and practice across all partners (councils, landowners, and communities). This can help to overcome challenges around individuals and organisations finding it difficult to adopt an enterprising mind-set and defaulting to simply 'doing what they know,' something which can be exacerbated by parks not being seen as enterprising places.

### **Design for the long term, with flexibility**

- Change takes time, and people, priorities and resources can shift. Have an approach, rather than a strict plan, which can be refocused to opportunities as they emerge.
- Be Enterprising: Income, funding and investment enables long term sustainability, paying for people and running costs, resulting in more social-environmental-economic benefit in an ongoing basis.
- Develop resources and tools, which are easy to find and follow, to support people to develop enterprising activity and to overcome common challenges encountered. This will support capacity building and expertise within the sector and among partners, to grow the work and result in greater benefit

### **Collaborate and be accountable to one another**

- Multiple departments in local authorities often have responsibility for different aspects of built assets. Effective cross-departmental working is thus essential for enabling progress to be achieved.
- Different departments' processes and timetables can impact progress. It is important to understand this, particularly for managing communications and expectations with community business and groups.
- Building internal relationships can have added benefits in supporting future work of a similar nature and enabling learning to be shared more widely, to improve processes and outcomes for both landowners and community stakeholders.
- To ensure buy-in internally, it is important to ensure the work aligns with broader strategic,

including inclusive growth, green recovery, and job generation.

- Community businesses and groups have limited capacity to engage in initiatives like PCBP. Encouraging and facilitating collaboration between them can help to overcome these challenges, enabling each to take on roles based on their capacity and expertise to achieve action.
- Respect that each partner has something to bring to the table, no matter what size or shape, and that trusted relationships may take time to develop.
- Demonstrate accountability, promoting honesty and transparency and delivering against agreed objectives.

### **Consider how to demonstrate, celebrate, and build on success**

- It is important to consider how to measure and evidence the impact of this work, given that it is inherently hard to measure, the additional requirements it may place on participating community businesses, and because it takes time for impact to be seen.
- Being able to demonstrate impact and success can help to lay the groundwork for more work along similar lines and garner buy-in internally, where concerns can be allayed, value demonstrated, and where impact aligns with strategic priorities.
- Start small and build on success; an iterative approach helps businesses test and prove an idea, gain a good reputation, to then scale or replicate the offer.







### The Shed: A Case Study

The Shed is a building in North Down Crescent Park in Keyham, which has historically been owned and managed by Plymouth City Council (PCC). The building was originally used as a groundskeeper's hut and later as a youth club, but for many years was unused.

Through the Pioneering Community Businesses in Parks (PCBP) initiative, Keyham Neighbourhood Watch (KNW) has been supported to undertake a community asset transfer. They currently have a temporary, six-month license to use the building, and are awaiting the outcome of an application for a longer-term lease of the building.

### Community energy

KNW has been active in the Keyham community for many years, working to 'protect, improve and celebrate everything that is great about Keyham.'

They have undertaken a number of initiatives to support the community, including gaining funding to install drop curbs to improve accessibility; providing a food parcel and prescription delivery service during Covid-19 lockdown periods; and raising money to install locks and alarms in residents' homes to help ensure residents feel safe. They also regularly run community events and activities. As such, they are well known and trusted by the local community.

For several years, KNW has wanted to take on responsibility for The Shed, to utilise it for the benefit of the Keyham community. However, despite their enthusiasm, limited progress had been made in achieving this. Through the PCBP initiative, they gained support from both the PCC FPA team and Real Ideas to move their plans forward and realise their ambitions for the space.

### Aspirations for The Shed

KNW's ambition for The Shed is to reopen it as a community hub and cafe for the people of Keyham, providing a base to run new and existing community events and initiatives, to help bring the community further together.

This includes using it as a base for their own community activities, including Easter egg hunts and international community days, as well as offering use of The Shed and its facilities to existing groups using the park, such as local youth football teams and schools. It is also hoped that this space will help to support the development of new activities within the community, by enabling it to be used by members of the community wanting to try out a new idea or activity. The Shed will also provide a space for young people in the area to use, with free Wi-Fi access.

*"This is one way to bring the community together. Everyone is really keen and enthusiastic about it."*

KNW Project Lead.

This sentiment around its value for the community of Keyham was shared by Real Ideas, who felt the space could be an asset for the people of Keyham in generating more positive, community-based activity to further enhance community connectedness.

*"It's going to be a huge asset for Keyham. They want to do more positive activity in their space and to give more opportunities to other residents, so the space can be used as a space to come together."*

Real Ideas Project Coordinator

### Making it happen

Through the PCBP initiative, KNW were provided with expert support and advice from Real Ideas to apply for a community asset transfer. Real Ideas brought expertise in community assets transfers as well as dedicated capacity to support KNW to develop their business plan, including financial forecasts. This ensured KNW provided all of information needed for their application to be considered and progressed,

and to demonstrate the value they could add through managing The Shed.

*"It was doing what we do well in terms of supporting communities to make positive change and empowering them."*

Real Ideas Project Coordinator

The support from Real Ideas was beneficial in helping KNW to 'think differently' about how the space could be used most effectively for the benefit of the community, as well as in enabling their application to be progressed more quickly than would otherwise have happened; PCC did not have the capacity to provide KNW with dedicated support with their application, and KNW did not have expertise in asset transfers, both of which Real Ideas were able to provide.

In addition, given Real Ideas' independent role and expertise in working with community groups, they were able to act as a 'bridge' between PCC and KNW, taking on the role of 'intermediary' to ensure that KNW understood PCC's processes and procedures relating to community asset transfers, and why certain information was required. They were also able to manage expectations around the speed at which the asset transfer could be achieved, given a recognition of the difference between how quickly community groups want things to progress compared to the speed at which local authorities can operate due to internal policies and processes.

This has resulted into KNW being granted a temporary 6-month lease to use The Shed, whilst they work with PCC to secure longer-term lease of the building through a community asset transfer. This will allow them to lease the building for a peppercorn rent, alongside a service level agreement which sets out mutually agreed social and environmental targets that KNW will report against on an annual basis. This will enable them to have autonomy over use of the building for community activities and provide evidence of their impact. Work to improve the building has already started, with PCC installing new windows and doors and with further work planned to support its ongoing usability and sustainability.



### Understanding impact

The Shed is already being used to support community events and activities, generating social value for the people of Keyham. The community now have more autonomy over the use of the building, helping to empower them to take ownership of their local spaces and ensure that The Shed is used most effectively for the benefit of the community.

*“It’s about people being more involved in the spaces they live in and having more autonomy and power. They’re on the ground so they know what is needed. It’s tapping into that grassroots expertise. Allowing them to do it themselves is to import and makes best use of the assets.”*

Real Ideas Project Coordinator

Transferring management of The Shed to KNW should allow PCC resources to be directed to other work, particularly valuable given that resources to manage and maintain such assets are increasingly scarce for local authorities.

This work has also helped the FPA team to build and strengthen internal relationships with other departments that have responsibility for assets. These solidified relationships will support and ease future work along similar lines for the FPA team but, more importantly, has led to work between the teams to make the asset transfer process easier to navigate for community groups.

### Looking to the Future

Whilst the community asset transfer is finalised, work is underway to improve The Shed to make it a space that the people of Keyham can be proud of and which will enable the community to make the most of it. The Shed has also become the centrepiece for wider regeneration of North Down Crescent Park, with plans in place for PCC to provide new playground equipment and a table tennis table, as well as planting trees and flowers, to make it a more vibrant and inviting space.

*“The plans look fabulous, and I’m really excited about the future now.”*

KNW Project Lead.

Whilst this case study underlines the time and resources required to support community asset transfer, it has developed inter-departmental relationships and resources that can be replicated for more efficient working long term. It has also put in place a framework to evidence the longer-term impact of the work for both communities and PCC, helping to make the case for why such work should be undertaken.







## Victoria Park Changing Room Block: A Case Study

Victoria Park Changing Room Block is an asset owned and managed by Plymouth City Council (PCC) which, prior to the Pioneering Community Businesses in Parks (PCBP) initiative, was used solely by local football teams as a changing facility.

Through PCBP, Be:Unique, a social enterprise, and the Friends of Victoria Park have been supported to undertake shared use of the asset, alongside continued use by football teams. This has enabled Be:Unique to deliver outdoor fitness sessions in the park, and supported the Friends group in their work to care for and increase community engagement with the park.

### Identifying an opportunity for more effective use of the asset

Through the PCBP initiative, the PCC team and Real Ideas identified that the changing room block in Victoria Park was being underutilised, used only by local football teams as a changing facility on weekends during the football season.

Stakeholder engagement identified that Be:Unique and the Friends of Victoria Park group wanted to have dedicated storage space in the park to enable them to carry out different activities. Both Be:Unique and the Friends group had previously requested temporary building structures to be installed in the park to enable this, but this was not a suitable option due to issues surrounding ongoing maintenance and upkeep.

Instead, through PCBP, both were provided with shared use of the existing changing room block in the park, providing them with the storage space needed to run their respective activities, and enabling more effective use of the asset for the benefit of PCC and the wider local community.

### Be:Unique's Perspective

Be:Unique offers personal training from their gym in Plymouth to support their members to improve their health and wellbeing. Paul Shannon, Director of Be:Unique, wanted to expand Be:Unique's offer to include outdoor group fitness sessions in Victoria Park. He hoped that this would provide a more affordable and flexible entry route in to exercise for people, in a fun and social environment, and would engage a wider audience in physical activity.

*"I've always done outdoor group fitness and I see that as a more affordable entry in to exercise for a lot of people."*

*Paul Shannon, Be:Unique*

To be able to run the outdoor fitness sessions efficiently, storage space for fitness equipment was needed. Paul's initial idea was to install a shipping container in the park, but this was not feasible. Instead, with support from PCC and Real Ideas, he was granted a licence to use the changing room block on a shared basis for equipment storage.

PCC negotiated use of the space with the football teams and worked with Real Ideas to draw up a licence for use of the space. Paul was initially granted a temporary six-month licence for use of the building, and following a successful trial period, now leases it on a rolling monthly basis. Paul highlighted the support from PCC and Real Ideas as invaluable in navigating the process and in progressing and realising his idea.

Be:Unique is now delivering a weekly outdoor fitness session in Victoria Park, something which Paul feels would not have been possible without use of the changing room block.

*"Having that space to have our equipment in is really useful. It wouldn't work without it."*

*Paul Shannon, Be:Unique*

For Be:Unique, this has supported business growth, adding 'another arm' to the business. Paul hopes to be able to deliver more sessions in the park in the future, as popularity grows, with the potential to create new jobs as a result. It has also benefitted Be:Unique more widely, with some attendees of the outdoor fitness sessions going on to become members of the gym.

Be:Unique has also helped to bring new users into the park and supported people to get more physically active, bringing about wider social benefits. This includes in offering a discounted price for local residents to encourage them to attend.

### Shared use of the space

The PCBP initiative has also enabled the Friends of Victoria Park group to obtain a licence to use the changing room block for storage of gardening and events equipment. This has been beneficial in making it easier for them to carry out gardening and maintenance activities and supporting them to deliver events in the park, all of which is beneficial for PCC, the park, and the local community.

Shared use of the changing rooms block by Be:Unique, the Friends of Victoria Park, and local football teams has been a successful approach to supporting more effective community use of assets, and has brought about benefits for each of them, as well as wider social benefits for the park and the local community.

### Looking to the future

The success of the shared use of the changing room block in Victoria Park has led to PCC expanding this approach to other areas of the city. For example, PCC is working in partnership to explore the reconfiguration of a community centre to accommodate football changing, in an area of the city where investment has been made in provision of high-quality football pitches. This enables access to a wider range of funding sources and reduces pressure on the service to build new facilities without long term maintenance funding in place.

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