

## Unlocking Assets Project Group Meeting

### 3.10.14 at London Funders

**Caroline Forster** (chair of the meeting) welcomed participants to the meeting. In reviewing the notes from the previous meeting, Caroline considered Jess Steele from Jericho Road Solutions as a returning speaker to provide an update on the Community Assets in Difficult Ownership in a future meeting.

The group discussed any updates since the last meeting and Lorraine Hart commented on the interesting dynamics and political tensions in inner London where there is a push for residential buildings, in terms of space, cost and local responses. All agreed this may make an interesting discussion for a future meeting agenda.

### **Our Urban Shop and Urban Food Routes**

#### **James Alcock, Plunkett Foundation**

Presentation available [here](#)

James gave an introduction to the history of the Plunkett Foundation and the recognition that their work had to be firmly rooted into the community that they were working in. The guiding principles of community ownership were noted as being:

- Businesses which trade primarily for community benefit
- They are democratically owned by members of their own community
- All members have equal say in how the business is run, regardless of level of their investment
- The interests of the business are linked into community control

People tend to approach the Plunkett Foundation to support them in establishing community ownership for one of two reasons:

- 1) As a response to market failure e.g. village shop closing or village pub. There is a good survival rate (95% success rate). Space can often be found in these buildings for community activities e.g. gym, gardens, post office, music, cafe. These activities are not just about protecting the service but about involving the community
- 2) As a response to market demands e.g. turn church into village shop and café. This often stimulates community cohesion and involvement.

James outlined the Our Urban Shop project and the discussion of whether the benefits of establishing rural shops could also be seen in cities. The urban community shops should be a new enterprise which is owned and operated by the community, seeking to maximise community participation and aiming to address local issues and challenges. The 2 year pilot, co-ordinated by the Plunkett Foundation and Locality, and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation aims to improve access to healthy affordable food and to stimulate community cohesion. Currently 100 communities have expressed in the project, over 30 are receiving remote advice and support, and the application process has just been opened up to support 10 of these with £5,000 worth of specialist business support. The Plunkett Foundation will shortly be making financial support available for up to six communities – this comprises a combination of grant and loan finance.

In addition to the Our Urban Shop pilot, the Plunkett Foundation also have the Urban Food Routes project which aims to make small food businesses sustainable by increasing community involvement and generating social benefits. Support (e.g. business planning, marketing, financial management,

legal and governance) and funding awarded to 32 'community businesses'. James gave some examples of projects and enterprises such as Sutton Community Farm and Bad Boys Bakery in Brixton Prison.

### **Questions:**

#### **How do you normally find projects?**

Normally, the Plunkett Foundation is approached directly by funders and communities. Last year there were 904 enquiries from interested communities and so currently quite reactive, though the plan is to become more proactive in seeking communities and areas.

Hopefully in the long term the process will become more sustainable as current work and projects inspire new ones.

#### **The process**

Often those who express interest look through the information and access remote support. About a third then come back to stage 2. However it is possible to go straight to stage 2 if social investment has already been secured.

#### **How this applies to London**

With so much change and churn of the local areas in London, it can be quite different to rural areas and even smaller cities; therefore can the same semi-volunteer model work? Also, premises are key to this issue in London as shop rents are very high.

It will be very important to track these issues and to collect evaluation and learning. This may help in the future when lobbying and trying to ask for resolutions in the future. Regarding premises searches, it will be interesting to see what comes out of this, but increasingly communities are looking at co-existing e.g. using phone boxes, public toilets etc

#### **Involving the community**

It can be difficult engaging people on low incomes to initiate community ownership projects, but once started, they generally involve the whole community in multiple ways e.g. as members, volunteers, employees, customers and beneficiaries. There is also the option for people to contribute financially according to what they can afford – they can buy membership shares, make donations, support fundraising events etc. Membership is open to anyone, but in a rural context, members are primarily people who live within that community.

### **BRICK**

**Biljana Savic, The Prince's Regeneration Trust**

Presentation available [here](#).

The Prince's Regeneration Trust BRICK programme aims to empower community groups to find the investment and support necessary to save their local heritage and build a better future for their local area. It has been funded by a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and contributions from the Alan Baxter Foundation and Purcell.

Biljana gave a background to the Prince's Regeneration Trust and the areas where they work. The Prince's

Regeneration Trust focuses on building capacity and skill, providing tools to those seeking to rescue heritage and deliver social benefits. The Prince's Regeneration Trust often get involved in the most complex projects where the benefits are greatest and community groups are struggling to move forwards. The PRT Community Impact Fund has also made significant progress in the past 12 months and hopes to launch in early 2015 with interest from a number of major funders.

The BRICK project puts an emphasis on innovation and fundraising to encourage networking and peer learning. It is aimed at community groups who are taking on assets and those who work with community groups e.g. councils, in order to help them find new ways and means to save their local heritage through innovation, collaboration and partnership. BRICK work streams include conferences, workshops, mentoring etc and support groups to structure their work. A partnerships brokers pilot helps groups to talk to each other to discuss legal issues and resolve conflict, and there is also an online platform to facilitate networking. This project recognises the importance of capacity building and continuous support, and creating forums for these groups to come together and learn from each other.

## **Questions**

### **Best way to get involved**

If an expression of interest form is completed on the website, decisions are then made based on the type of programme, how urgent the work is and if there is someone that can work with it. From March, BRICK will be able to support at least 15 projects. There is a lot of interest in mentoring, and most workshops become full, so there is a lot of demand.

### **Is the support very specific to certain types of buildings/ projects?**

Even if the building is valued under £8m, the support from BRICK can still be accessed. Although some of the work is tailored and often from a heritage perspective, support and funding is not limited to listed buildings and can also go to local buildings. The guide also covers private donors, loans, and income generators etc.

### **Next meeting**

16<sup>th</sup> January 2015, 10 am - 12 noon, London Funders

### **Participants**

Candice Motran, Big Society Capital  
Kirstin Ross, CAN  
Wai Chan, Centre For Accessible Environments  
Jaishree Mistry, Charity Bank  
Lorraine Hart, Community Land Use  
Ruth Thompson, Ethical Property Foundation  
Alice Kershaw, Heritage Lottery Fund  
Jeffrey Hopwood, London Borough of Camden  
Neil Webster, London Borough of Enfield  
Kashmir Takhar, London Borough of Harrow  
Joanna Eve, London Borough of Islington  
Grace Gbadamosi, London Borough of Lambeth  
Matthew Henaughan, London Borough of Lewisham  
Nasim Ahmed, London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
Catherine Glew, New Philanthropy Capital

James Alcock, Plunkett Foundation (**Speaker**)  
Zara Ransley, Prince's Regeneration Trust  
Biljana Savic, Prince's Regeneration Trust (**Speaker**)  
Caroline Forster, The Social Investment Business (**Chair**)

**In attendance**

Becky Green, London Funders

**Apologies for absence**

Ruth Thompson, Ethical Property Foundation  
Kashmir Takhar, London Borough of Harrow  
Matthew Henaughan, London Borough of Lewisham  
Nasim Ahmed, London Borough of Tower Hamlets