Unlocking Assets Project Group Meeting

Caroline Forster (chair of the meeting) welcomed participants to the meeting. In reviewing the notes from the previous meeting of 19th January, Lorraine Hart provided a short update on Community Land Use and the plans for a new research project. Lorraine confirmed that it was difficult to find resources to support the work as it is a London-wide project, but that she was looking into making direct approaches.

Borough updates

Grace Gbadamosi provided an update on the activities at the **London Borough of Lambeth**. Grace outlined a 2 year support programme to guide several VCS organisations into an independent state where they are independent of council funding. There has been a positive response and commitment from those involved, who have taken on these buildings, and as LB Lambeth are now planning the second phase of this programme with a different cohort, they will be evaluating the lessons learnt from the first phase.

Jeffrey Hopwood described some of the **London Borough of Camden**'s activities. They have worked with the VCS to develop new lease contracts over a number of months, and Jeffrey outlined some of the challenges encountered in this project. Where other colleagues may look into a similar project, the group discussed that the time required for such a project should not be underestimated, and that very solid support would be needed. It may also be useful for guidelines to be available at the very start of the process in order to tackle the common fear of liability.

The **London Borough of Tower Hamlets** have recently been looking closely and learning from the work of other boroughs. Nasim Ahmed described one recent approach where groups signed up to a service level agreement attached to the lease which included deliverables based around the use of the building for the community. They have found that groups are delivering well after signing a lease with this SLA in place. This topic was discussed as a possible presentation for a future project group meeting.

The group discussed the idea of 'community hubs' and where this can be a useful idea. Some comments reflected the need to not be too prescriptive about the community services on offer, and allow some flexibility for people to gather informally and to do the activities that they choose. Sometimes single organisations run these hubs, and other cases see several organisations come together. Some positive examples were given of where community hubs have been very successful, and where a community association has been built up in order to take on the hub, including a pricing structure where those who can afford the lease subsidise those who can't.

The group discussed whether it would be useful for London Funders to do some work to help other funders to understand the challenges facing some organisations where related to assets, leases and the requirement for guidance or advice.

Although unable to attend this meeting, Claire Witney from London Borough of Waltham Forest will attend a future project group meeting in order to present on a recently completed project allowing local residents and informal groups to use community facilities within library buildings.

Another possible topic for future meetings could include feedback from a survey being carried out by Ethical Property Foundation. This piece of research examines the key property issues national charities face.

More information about this can be found [on their website](#).

Community Assets in Difficult Ownership
Jess Steele, Jericho Road Solutions

Jess outlined the Community Assets in Difficult Ownership (CADO) programme. CADO is a demonstration programme designed to help councils and community groups to bring precious buildings out of the limbo of irresponsible ownership.

Jess's powerpoint presentation is [available to download here](#).

The presentation began with some examples of buildings including piers, theatres and a fire station, both in London and across the UK, which are at risk due to various degrees of neglect and irresponsible ownership. In looking at how these buildings can be saved, Jess outlined the lessons that can be learnt from Hastings, in the campaign to save the Hastings pier. Piers can often have very difficult ownership, where owners are delinquent or where the property is not a priority. One of the main lessons to be learnt from this example is that of determination and public will. In a campaign running from 2009, a Compulsory Purchase Order was finally enacted in 2013 and the pier was returned to local ownership.

Jericho Road Solutions and Locality are carrying out a survey to assess local authorities and their powers to deal with derelict/disused buildings and land, as well as looking for the perspective and local knowledge of community and heritage organisations. The initial findings provide some examples of delinquent behaviour:

- Failure to maintain
- Refusal to allow meanwhile use
- Destruction of heritage features
- Debt burdens
- Poor fire protection
- No insurance
- Speculative planning applications to raise value
- Offshore/ secretive ownership

The local authority responses to these problems included that it was difficult, expensive, risky, or an interference with private ownership.

76% of respondents did see that the buildings at risk were a problem and 86% that it was a priority to deal with it. The responses showed that there was a general lack of awareness and understanding about what could be done, with few people knowing about possible solutions other than compulsory purchase. Guidance is not clear or widely known about, citizens and community groups don't know what can be done and most people don't think that the current powers to deal with derelict/ disused buildings and land are effective.

The CADO programme would like to:

- Support 10 demonstrator projects, with specialist advice and an action learning set.

- Share the lessons from these

- Produce better guidance for the existing enforcement mechanisms, and promote widely.

- Define, name and shame delinquency.

- Research policy change options.

In some cases, owners may refuse to take part in discussion as they are waiting for the land value to increase. This is very common, especially in London, but this is where an escalating penalties approach would be useful, to at least aim to make the building available for alternative use where possible.

If delinquent ownership could be defined, then the process could become a lot quicker. Another approach could be that of a stewardship fund as there is a twin track between ownership and funding: where there is difficult ownership then funding is hard to find. A stewardship fund or similar approach would require a good level of understanding between funders and local authorities. These buildings don't disappear and many of these local buildings do have local groups who are willing to work to save them. There should be zero tolerance for difficult or delinquent ownership of a 'precious building'.

Jericho Road Solutions are attending a series of events to promote the CADO project, and will soon have 10 demonstrated projects on a website. London funders can support this by encouraging groups to complete the survey, and by communicating with local communities about CADO and about what can be done. Consideration to the idea of stewardship funds that could help in emergency situations and other approaches would give funders and local authorities a more open level of understanding of this issue.

Next meeting
3 October 2014, 10 am - 12 noon, London Funders

Participants
Nasim Ahmed, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Joanna Eve, London Borough of Islington
Caroline Forster, The Social Investment Business **(Chair)**
Stephen Frost, London Borough of Hounslow
Grace Gbadamosi, London Borough of Lambeth
Lorraine Hart, Community Land Use
Jeffrey Hopwood, London Borough of Camden
Jaishree Mistry, Charity Bank
Jess Steele, Jericho Road **(Speaker)**
Ruth Thompson, Ethical Property Foundation

In attendance
David Warner and Becky Green, London Funders

Apologies for absence
Victor Oshinowo, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Kashmir Takhar, London Borough of Harrow
Claire Witney, London Borough of Waltham Forest