

Unlocking Assets Project Group Meeting

16.04.15 at London Funders

Caroline Forster (chair of the meeting) welcomed participants to the meeting. Attendees confirmed that there were no comments further to the notes from the previous meeting.

Ethical Property Foundation – Charity Property Matters survey
Antonia Swinson and Ruth Thompson, Ethical Property Foundation
Presentation available [here](#)

The following information was also circulated:

- [An introduction to Ethical Property Foundation](#)
- [A summary of the survey findings](#)
- [Property training information](#)

Ethical Property Foundation offer independent, ethical advice and training to help charities and voluntary groups rent, buy, let or manage their property, and also work with landlords and developers to help reduce the social and environmental impact of commercial property.

This survey was an update to a previous survey which was carried out in 2012. It had 400 respondents and found that:

- 45% of charities think property is the greatest risk to their long term survival – up 4% on 2012.
- A third of charities paid for commercial property advice in the last three years.
- A further 40% rely on informal advice from friends and contacts.
- Over 40% experience difficulty in obtaining core funding to cover premises costs.
- 47% would consider sharing space to reduce costs.
- Half the charities surveyed felt their local authority was broadly supportive of the role of the voluntary sector. However over 80% felt there was insufficient opportunity to be involved in strategic planning on provision of premises.

This provided a snapshot of the current position, but Ethical Property Foundation will be looking at how they can use the 2 surveys to look at trends going forwards.

Many charities do not obtain adequate advice and support on property. Ethical Property Foundation feel they need to help the sector understand strategy and planning what should be done in advance. There are some things that need to be paid for, and others (e.g., licence template on Ethical Property Foundation website) can be found for free.

Funding for core costs remains a challenge for the sector, especially for management of premises. Poor property management can put services at risk.

Sharing space can be an effective way to save costs, however attendees noted how this process can sometimes be complex – it can be very helpful in some cases and in others not possible or helpful. It's important to look further into the different ways that people share spaces. E.g. different days,

open spaces, different offices. There are plenty of successful examples, but need to go beyond the sector to look for it.

Fairplace award (social enterprise offering)

The [fairplace award](#) is a new ethical workplace standard, launched late 2014, which recognises a company's commitment to people and planet and aims to align workplace management to corporate social responsibility. The scheme is managed by the Ethical Property Foundation and they are keen to work with local authorities, funders and central government.

Community Assets in Difficult Ownership – an update

Jess Steele, Jericho Road Solutions

Presentation available [here](#)

The following handouts were also circulated:

- [An introduction to CADO](#)
- [CADO survey results](#)
- [CADO outline of regulations and types of notice](#)

The Community Assets in Difficult Ownership (CADO) programme has been working with 10 demonstrator projects across England to help communities and councils tackle these challenging buildings. Jess Steele provided an update on the individual progress of these projects, who have received expert advice, small grants and action learning. Some of these buildings have been empty for up to 15, 20 or even over 30 years. Because they have been empty they are usually not eligible for listing 'assets of community value', despite strong community support and long histories of community service.

'Delinquent ownership' can come in many forms:

- Failure to maintain
- Destruction of heritage features
- Refusal to allow meanwhile uses
- Debit burdens
- Poor fire protections
- No insurance
- Speculative planning apps to raise value
- Offshore/ secretive ownership

Jess described what she called the 'DER response' - too difficult/ risky/ expensive to do anything about it, sometimes along with the belief that you can't interfere with private ownership.

The key lessons from the CADO programme to date have been:

- Community engagement, building support e.g. using petitions effectively
- Serious lack of understanding of the powers
- Independent expert advice is invaluable

- Loans to support enforcement. Due to austerity, enforcement can be increasingly difficult for local authorities, despite the legislation all being based on councils being able to recover any funds they spend in doing the works where the owner fails to. English Heritage offer an enforcement agreement for buildings Grade 2* and above, but currently there are no offers for Grade 2. If enforcement starts sooner the works are less extensive so the owner is more likely to be able to meet the cost.
- Section 215 ('grot-busting') is still terribly underused
- ACV inadequacy – most CADO buildings can't be listed
- Use of Repairs Notice to lay down expectations of a current or new owner
- Grants for valuations, options appraisals etc

Jess outlined several lessons for funders. Small grants are crucial for the rescue of buildings (£2,000 – 10,000) and it's important to be flexible, engaged and to recognise that it takes time for them to know what they will need. Support is also very important.

Annual reviews of empty assets of community value may be helpful to ensure that they are not forgotten and that the owners are aware that there is interest. It's also very important to push through on debt recovery as this will also help with prevention (deterrence).

A policy paper has been drafted to support communities and councils to rescue buildings from difficult ownership . It currently contains approximately 44 recommendations and there is a strong focus on transparency. The proposals are grouped into the following issues:

- Supportive political context, influence opinion
- Ownership transparency and site information
- Advice and support for enforcement
- Advice and support for rescue
- ACV reform – don't count the empty years, annual reviews of empty ACVs
- Compulsory Transfer Order and Quicktake (suggested new powers)
- Deal with Crown immunity from enforcement
- A dedicated solution to CADO? (e.g. a CADO agency that would aim to be self-supporting)

These policy proposals will be circulated to the group in due course.

Next meeting

14th July 2015, 10 am - 12 noon, London Funders

Participants

Hasanul Hoque	Camden Town Unlimited
Simon Pitkeathley	Camden Town Unlimited
Kirstin Ross	CAN
Jaishree Mistry	Charity Bank
Lorraine Hart	Community Land Use
Antonia Swinson	Ethical Property Foundation (Speaker)
Ruth Thompson	Ethical Property Foundation (Speaker)
Alice Kershaw	Heritage Lottery Fund
Jess Steele	Jericho Road (Speaker)
Jeffrey Hopwood	London Borough of Camden
Neil Webster	London Borough of Enfield
Khosi Mabena	London Borough of Hackney
Caroline Forster	The Social Investment Business

In attendance

Becky Green, London Funders
David Warner, London Funders

Apologies for absence

Glenn Miller, London Borough of Barnet
Wilf Langridge, London Borough of Islington
Grace Gbadamosi, London Borough of Lambeth
Juliana Bell, Metropolitan Migration Foundation