



Strand 1 Report



Evaluation of the Community Assets Programme

Big Lottery Fund and
Office of the Third Sector

Rocket Science UK Ltd

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Executive Summary

This report is the output of the first strand of the evaluation of the Community Assets Programme, managed by the Big Lottery Fund on behalf of the Office of the Third Sector. It summarises the evaluators' work to date and identifies issues and themes that we will take forward in later strands of the evaluation.

The main focus of this strand has been to establish project baselines and stakeholder perspectives. The strand's activities included a project review with lead partners (third sector and local authority); a partnership scorecard completed by both partners; stakeholder interviews and a practitioner workshop.

Community Assets has made £30 million available to refurbish local authority buildings and so to facilitate their transfer to ownership by third sector organisations. The aim of the programme is community empowerment. Community Assets will work towards this by focusing on achieving the following outcomes:

- Local third sector organisations have greater security and independence, and are better able to meet the needs of the communities they serve;
- Communities have more access to better quality facilities that respond to their needs;
- There is more effective partnership working between local authorities and the third sector.

The emerging headline findings of Strand 1 include:

- The programme was massively over-subscribed.
- The level of demand and challenging application timeframes favoured those projects with well-established partnerships and pre-existing plans for the asset.
- The support programme provided by the DTA is emerging as an important value added element in the Programme.
- There is significant demand for support amongst partners in developing business and financial plans.
- The provision of office and meeting space as part of the refurbished asset illustrates the potential for assets to support other organisations and services as well as develop the capacity and activities of the asset 'owner'.
- In most cases both local authorities and the TSOs had similarly positive perspectives on how their partnership was progressing.
- There are different asset transfer journeys being adopted in different situations. Developing an 'ideal' asset transfer model will perhaps be more about developing a 'menu' of good practice elements that can be chosen as appropriate, rather than prescribing a set process.

These and other findings and issues will be explored in Strands 2 and 3 over the next two years.

1. Introduction

The Community Assets Programme has a key role to play in delivering government policy in relation to **community empowerment**. The guidance notes to the Programme state that this aim will be achieved by facilitating the transfer of genuine assets from local authorities to the third sector for their use as community resources.

The programme's aim directly reflects the broader aspirations of both the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) and the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) around developing an environment which enables the third sector to thrive and bring real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need.

Given the dynamic and fast-moving agenda in which the programme operates our approach to the evaluation is to make it formative and flexible in nature to ensure that lessons are captured on an ongoing basis and that rich and robust information is gathered to help inform policy and practice.

This report is the output of the first strand of the evaluation. It is not intended to be a conclusive or comprehensive evaluation of the Programme but it is an important stage in the formative and summative process that we are undertaking.

The report is set out in the following sections:

- Policy context: overview of government policy relating to community asset transfer;
- Community Assets Programme: history of the programme and its aim and intended outcomes;
- Our approach to undertaking the evaluation;
- Emerging findings: drawn from the research to date;
- Initial reflections: based on the emerging findings;
- Next steps: looking ahead to Strand 2.

There is also a separate appendix accompanying this report, which contains profiles for each of the 38 community assets and the neighbourhoods in which they're located.

2. The Policy Context

Community asset transfer is not a new phenomenon. There is a long tradition of management and sometimes ownership of former public assets by tenants and community organisations. However, historically, there has not been a strategic approach to asset transfer policy. Rather than considering it as a central element of a community empowerment process, or a tool within an asset strategy to ensure maximum community value, assets have been passed to third sector groups sporadically, often in response to local pressure, which has diminished their potential broader community impact. In the past, this lack of strategy, and the tendency to regard the process as a means of cutting costs, has meant that the empowerment impact of asset transfer on communities has not always been recognised.

In recent years the process of asset transfer from local authorities to third sector organisations (TSOs) has risen in importance as a means of achieving key policy objectives relating to neighbourhood regeneration and community empowerment.

Asset transfer was highlighted as an important way of providing community facilities by the review of the third sector's role in regeneration in *The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration: final report*. Published in July 2007, the Office of the Third Sector and HM Treasury report emphasised, "the importance of developing community assets to enable community organisations to generate their own wealth, become more enterprising, deliver services and strengthen community engagement and cohesion."¹

A further important driver of this agenda is the Empowerment White Paper ***Communities in control: real people, real power***, published in July 2008. *Communities in control* is a robust statement of intent for how central government should work with local government, third sector organisations and individual citizens to involve communities more actively and meaningfully and to share responsibility for shaping neighbourhoods and service delivery. It includes actions to:

- extend the new statutory 'duty to involve', already scheduled to come into effect in April 2009;
- establish participatory budgeting that involves the community in decision-making; and
- improve local democracy through encouraging participation and enhanced community accountability.

A second strand of policy driving this agenda is the refocusing of local authorities as outlined in the Local Government White Paper published in

¹ HM Treasury and Cabinet Office (2006), *The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration: final report*, p32

2006. ***Strong and Prosperous Communities*** sets out a vision of local authorities as stewards of assets, place shapers and conveners of partner organisations in the locality. It also highlights the role that asset ownership can play in giving communities the stability and confidence to develop and grow.

A third policy strand has focused on encouraging local government to manage its asset base well, including ‘sweating’ and disposing of assets as appropriate. In 2004 local authorities were set a target by HM Treasury to dispose of £24 billion worth of assets by 2010. The Comprehensive Spending Review settlement for local government in 2007 also increased pressure on local authorities to maximise investment income from the asset base. As part of this, the use of Local Asset Backed Vehicles (LABV)² is strongly promoted by parts of government and is becoming increasingly popular as a way of unlocking equity and investment from the private and potentially the third sectors.

In addition to these wider policy strands, two reviews undertaken in the last two years specifically considered the role of asset transfer as a vehicle for empowering communities and more effectively meeting their needs.

Assets, Communities and Empowerment

An important precursor of the Community Assets Programme was the publication by CLG of ***Community Assets: the benefits and costs of community management and ownership***³ in June 2006. The report observed that, with a secure base, TSOs are more able to strengthen their organisational and financial resilience by establishing income generating activities and becoming even more embedded in the local community. As such, the “ownership of capital assets is inextricably linked with the sustainability and continued growth of the community sector”.

To support the transfer of assets, the *Community Assets* report recommended that:

- Pre-construction project funding should be provided to support TSOs to develop well-prepared project proposals;
- Capital funding streams should be put in place so that community-based organisations can purchase land and buildings from a range of owners;
- Investment in organisational development is essential in order to ensure that community-based organisations seeking to acquire

² Local Asset Backed Vehicles are partnerships whereby a public sector body contributes land and the private sector funding based on the value of this land. Future profits from the development of this land are often shared.

³ CLG (2006) *Community Assets: the benefits and costs of community management and ownership*. This report was written by Stephen Thake of London Metropolitan University on behalf of the Civil Renewal Unit in CLG.

- capital assets have capacity to take on board their new challenges; and
- Establishing local partnerships between community-based organisations and a local registered social landlord would allow the TSO to focus on its core activities while learning about long-term facilities management.

Building on these recommendations Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of London Borough of Lewisham, was asked by the Government to further investigate the potential for asset transfer from local authorities to third sector organisations.

The Quirk Review's final report ***Making Assets Work: Review of community ownership and management of public assets*** was published in May 2007. It found that whilst many local authorities were engaged in asset management planning very few had linked this to asset transfer to the third sector. At the same time, whilst successful asset transfers had taken place all around the country, these represented isolated good practice examples and there was little evidence that they had contributed to the Council's or the Local Strategic Partnership's sustainable community objectives.

Furthermore, the Review found that while there had been a considerable amount of guidance and advice for local authorities aimed at improving the quality of asset management plans, none of this referred to the potential for using local authority land and property assets to achieve community empowerment objectives through community management and ownership.

The Review identified several characteristics that a good asset transfer process demonstrates.

The first characteristic is the existence of a **positive, ongoing partnership** between the local authority and the third sector organisation. A strong partnership is essential for minimising the likelihood that 'assets' are in fact liabilities. It is also important that this partnership does not end at the point of transfer as there will undoubtedly be a need to support the development of the third sector organisation in acquiring the necessary skills to effectively run the asset.

A second characteristic relates to building the capacity of the third sector organisations. Most community organisations are set up to run a project, deliver a service or start and run an enterprise, not manage a building. The skills required to acquire and manage buildings are very specialised and so **supporting TSOs through the asset transfer process and beyond** can make a big difference to the success of the transfer and the sustainability of the organisation running the asset in the longer term.

Additionally, the Quirk review emphasised the need for the public sector to use government monies more effectively. Specifically, it focused on the

need to **maximise leverage potential** by channelling funding through specialist community development finance institutions that are most able to access additional funds held by the private sector.

The overarching key message of the Review was that the process of community asset transfer, when carried out in the right way, can support several important policy objectives at the local level.

The wider asset transfer landscape

The Community Assets Programme is part of a fast-changing field of policy and practice in relation to community empowerment, asset transfer and third sector support. There are a range of existing and forthcoming programmes, initiatives and funds that aim to support the development of the third sector. Those that have particular connections with the Community Assets programme include:

Advancing Assets

Advancing Assets for Communities is a demonstration programme funded by the CLG and delivered by a consortium led by the Development Trust Association. It aims to explore how local authorities and community-led organisations can be supported to develop joint plans for asset transfer in line with the recommendations of the Quirk Review, and to begin to implement them. It offers tailored consultancy and advice to bring interested partnerships to a stage where they are ready to transfer assets. The programme runs from 2007 until 2010 and will work with 110 local authorities and their third sector partners.

While Advancing Assets shares the objective of achieving asset transfers, it is more developmental in approach than the Community Assets Programme. Its target group is local authorities and third sector organisations that are interested in asset transfer, but that may currently lack capacity to undertake it successfully.

Communitybuilders

Communitybuilders, which will become operational in 2009, is a £70m investment fund which takes forward a commitment within the *Communities in Control: real people, real power* White Paper to build more cohesive, empowered and active communities.

The fund, which is jointly funded by CLG and the OTS, is designed to empower citizens and communities by strengthening the resilience of multi-purpose community-led organisations across England. It will offer a mixture of financial and advisory support and fund organisations that:

- Offer a place for communities to meet;
- Support and promote active and empowered citizens and community groups;
- Provide and host community services;
- Mobilise opportunities and resources within and into a local area.

Although Communitybuilders has a strong focus on enabling a step change in the capacity of organisations to deliver on the empowerment agenda, there are similarities with the Community Assets Programme. The provision of both financial and advisory support reinforces the similarity and there is scope to feed in lessons learnt about the initial implementation of the Programme to the establishment of Communitybuilders.

Adventure Capital Fund/Futurebuilders

The Adventure Capital Fund, established in 2002, offers community-based organisations a combination of financial investment, advice and support to develop social enterprises as part of their activities. Several of ACF's investee organisations are developing and running workspace premises.

ACF also recently took over the management of the Futurebuilders Fund, which, since its launch in 2004, has provided loan and grant based finance to support third sector organisations to develop their capacity to deliver public services.

The similarities between ACF's and the Community Assets Programme's cohort of projects provides opportunities to compare and contrast their progress over the next few years.

Capacitybuilders

Capacitybuilders delivers the Government's ChangeUp programme which provides support to third sector infrastructure organisations that support frontline third sector organisations, and so aims to cascade improvements in the strength and capacity of the sector. It funds those organisations that work towards:

- providing advice, training and development for third sector organisations
- promoting communication and collaboration across the sector
- garnering third sector action where clear gaps exist
- ensuring the views and experience of the sector can influence policy and partnership working.

Capacitybuilders' most recent funding announcement (November 2008) includes details of three phases of capital investment, aiming to improve access by frontline third sector organisations to high quality and affordable facilities and services offered by local resource centres across England. This capital grants programme, which will run until March 2011, is the last main funding stream to be announced by Capacitybuilders under the OTS's 2008-11 £88.5m investment in ChangeUp.

From this overview, the Community Assets Programme can be seen as filling a 'market gap' in the asset transfer and third sector support landscape. Future strands of the evaluation will monitor the empowerment agenda as it develops and, in particular, will explore in greater detail relationships between the various initiatives and how the programme fits into and influences it.

3. The Community Assets Programme

The Community Assets Programme is an important indication of the seriousness with which the Government views the potential of asset transfer to make a substantial contribution to empowering communities and supporting the third sector. It aligns with trends in community empowerment policy and builds on the Quirk Review's recommendations by combining capital funding with support and advice in order to strengthen ongoing partnerships between local authorities and local third sector organisations.

The Community Assets Programme was originally announced in the Pre-Budget Report in December 2006 with the intention to "make it easier for communities and community groups to take on the management or ownership of local authority assets".⁴ In addition to the learning from the Quirk review, the programme was also a response to the 12-week consultation undertaken by the OTS between March and June 2007.

The aim of the programme is **community empowerment**. The guidance notes to the programme state that this aim will be achieved by facilitating the transfer of genuine assets from local authorities to the third sector for their use as community resources.

The programme seeks to achieve three outcomes:

- Local third sector organisations have greater security and independence, and are better able to meet the needs of the communities they serve;
- Communities have more access to better quality facilities that respond to their needs;
- There is more effective partnership working between local authorities and the third sector.

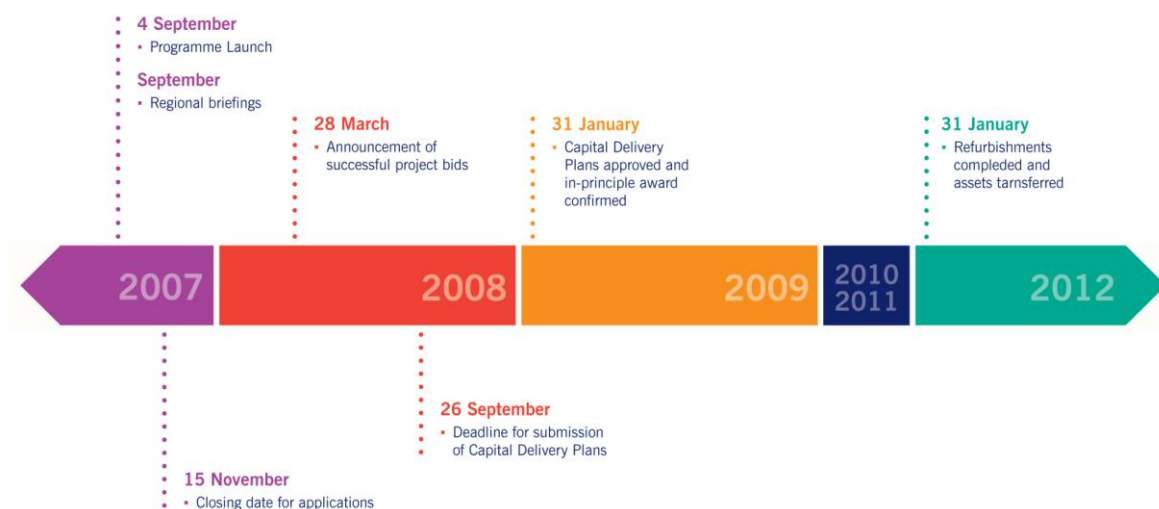
At a specific project level, the programme seeks to support partnerships that have:

- identified an appropriate asset;
- an asset that is genuine and offers opportunity and sustainability;
- ensured that the asset will be fully utilised;
- an asset that has been refurbished to reflect community priorities;
- ensured that the asset is environmentally sustainable.

The diagram below illustrates the programme timeline:

⁴ HM Treasury (2006), *Investing in Britain's potential: Building our long-term future*, Pre-Budget Report 2006

COMMUNITY ASSETS PROGRAMME TIMELINE



Worth £30 million, the programme represents a significant investment in community transfer projects across the country. Managed on behalf of the OTS by BIG, the programme offers grants for the refurbishment of local authority buildings in England, enabling their transfer to third sector ownership for use by the whole community.

Through the programme 38 projects have each received in-principle offers of grants ranging from £150,000 to £1 million to refurbish local authority buildings in England and enable their transfer to third sector ownership for use by the wider community.

The key characteristics of a good asset transfer process identified by the Quirk Review and the consultation on the programme have been built into the structure and nature of it. The programme places **strong emphasis on partnerships** between the local authority and the recipient third sector organisation at every stage of the process. Its guidance makes it clear from the outset that the programme will “only make grants to organisations that have a strong partnership in place... [and] will prioritise projects which demonstrate good partnership working.”⁵

The Community Assets programme also recognises the technical experience and ability required to successfully complete an asset transfer and oversee complex refurbishments. As such, a **programme of support** for project applicants over the lifetime of the programme is an integral part of the scheme. The support is being delivered by the Development

⁵ The Big Lottery Fund, *Community Assets: guidance notes*, p11.

Trusts Association and provides tailored packages of organisational, professional, technical and other relevant support for successful partnerships.

An anticipated outcome of the programme is to provide the initial momentum to make refurbishments possible and give TSOs a **more secure base** from which to develop new activities and services, and to seek additional funding and income streams.

4. Our approach to the evaluation

The overall aim of the evaluation is to:

"Assess the success of the programme in encouraging and implementing the process of asset transfer from local authorities to third-sector organisations and so moving towards achieving the programme's outcomes"

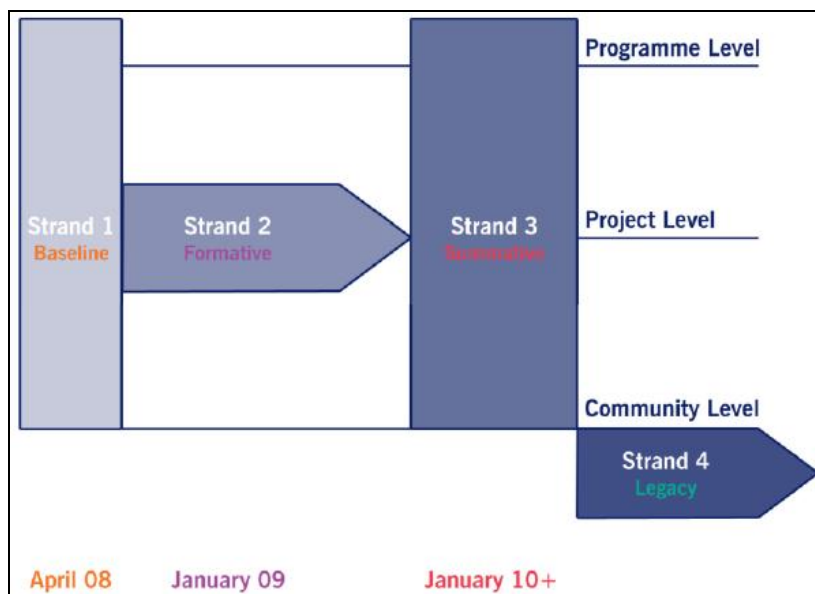
The objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Identify and explain trends in the types of areas and organisations that applied and were funded – or not;
- Describe and analyse the processes by which asset transfer occurs through the Programme;
- Identify barriers and factors for success in the asset transfers encouraged by the Programme;
- Inform policy-making and guidance in this field for the benefit of the main stakeholder groups involved;
- Identify learning points relevant to the development and implementation of asset transfer programmes and projects and, where possible, to identify learning points that can be applied to improve the management of the programme while it is being delivered.

An additional objective of the evaluation is to explore the extent to which achieving the programme's three outcomes will result in the ultimate goal of the programme: community empowerment.

Our approach to meeting the aim and objectives of the evaluation involves a high degree of **qualitative assessment**. This approach will enable us to evaluate the outcomes of the Community Assets programme on three different levels: the programme level, the project level and the community level. The chart below illustrates our overall approach and shows how this breaks down across four strands and three levels. We anticipate these being achieved at different times and in different ways and our four-strand approach aims to adopt a 'right touch' at the 'right time' approach.

An essential element of the evaluation will be capturing the asset transfer journey of projects as they go through the programme. With this in mind, we have designed a **flexible formative process** that will aid the collection of experience, insight and knowledge and explore how this impacts on the delivery of project and programme objectives.



What we've done so far

Strand 1: Laying the foundations and building the baseline

Strand 1 consisted of the activity undertaken by Rocket Science since our appointment as the programme's evaluators in April 2008. Specifically we have:

- Reviewed the application process to identify and explain trends in the types of areas and organisations that applied for the Community Assets Programme.
- Interviewed the lead partner from each project about their initial experience of the programme, their aspirations for their project, the changes that they anticipate in their community, and the challenges that they perceive to be ahead.
- Conducted a survey with project participants to gauge their perceptions of different aspects of their partnership.
- Consulted with stakeholders of the programme to explore their perspectives of the programme and to identify key issues that the evaluation should consider.
- Reviewed the support programme through discussions with DTA case managers.

What we'll do in the future

Strand 2: Formative Learning

The second strand of activity, which will take place during 2009, will be almost entirely focused on developing rich and meaningful information on the process that individual projects are going through to meet their project requirements and those of the programme.

Editor's note: We have updated the original text of this section to take account of changes to plans and timetables since this report was written. The most current version of overall plans is available at http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_eval_comm_assets_outline.pdf

We will undertake a survey to review where projects have got to, where they are going and the challenges that they face.

This approach will enable us to make BIG and OTS aware of any common issues during the project implementation phase and to identify practice-based solutions for managing asset transfer. Crucially, it will help us to track lessons learnt and to identify where groups have similar or distinct sets of issues and how they have approached them.

Strand 3: Summative Evaluation

Strand 3, which will begin in 2010, is where we will conduct a full end of programme evaluation. This will involve revisiting the various studies conducted during the first strand to produce the following outputs:

- Programme review to include analysis of spend, outputs and outcomes;
- Project review by typology to review success, outputs and outcomes, lessons learned and good practice;
- Distance travelled survey to compare baseline information around stakeholder perceptions with the end of the programme;
- Review of DTA delivered support programme.

We may also look at unsuccessful projects to see if there are any lessons that can be learnt in this area and fed back into the management and support structures.

All these components will be drawn together in a final evaluation report, supported by a series of case studies and lessons learnt. We will review with stakeholders how best to disseminate the lessons.

Strand 4: Legacy

We believe that it is imperative that we look at a legacy evaluation process in order to capture the longer-term impact of the programme on community empowerment. Part of our approach is that this is built into the self-evaluation processes which projects are required to adopt.

We will develop an empowerment evaluation toolkit for use by projects to capture the changes over time and to measure their own impact on their local community.

Capturing the data at a project level will enable BIG, OTS and the projects themselves to gather comparable longitudinal information on the impact of the asset well into the future. This recognises that empowerment is a long term evolutionary process and that a transferred asset is likely to be the catalyst for broader empowerment and engagement over a longer period of time.

5. Emerging Findings

Review of the application process

We conducted a review of the application process to identify and explain trends in the types of areas and organisations that applied for the Community Assets Programme and were funded.

- The demand for the programme significantly outweighed the resources available. The £30m budget was approximately five times over bid. 38 out of the original 220 (17.2%) applications have received in-principle awards.

Category	No of applications	Total	Average
Total	220	£156,015,931	£709,163
Awards	38	£29,829,962	£784,999
Reserves	10	£6,845,384	£684,538
Rejects	89	£64,505,224	£724,778
Grading Rejects	2	£1,043,742	£521,871
Early Rejects	89	£59,406,571	£667,490

Reserves -- Fundable applications held in reserve in case any in-principle grant offers are withdrawn.

Rejects -- Fundable applications that were rejected by the committee because there were insufficient funds available.

Grading rejects -- Applications that scored poorly during assessment.

Early rejects -- Applications that failed basic initial requirements as outlined in the programme guidance notes.

- An analysis of the application results by the **lead applicant status** showed that successful applications were more likely to have been led by local authorities (66%) than unsuccessful ones (56%).
- **Awards and rejections by region** - All regions had successful and unsuccessful projects. London had the highest number of successful Community Assets programme awards (8) and the South West and the Eastern (2) having the least. The North West had the highest number of unsuccessful applications (31), with the East Midlands (11) having the lowest. The East Midlands had the highest number of successful applications in relation to the total number submitted (4 out of 15) and the South West the lowest (2 out of 25).

Region	Number of awards	Value (£)	%	Number of rejects	Value	%
Eastern	2	£1,198,722	5%	16	£14,080,272	9%
East Midlands	4	£2,881,092	11%	11	£7,180,717	6%
London	8	£6,219,876	21%	25	£14,509,645	14%
North East	6	£3,612,291	16%	19	£13,184,100	10.5%
North West	7	£4,961,168	18%	32	£18,749,982	18%
South East	3	£2,035,772	9%	17	£15,712,870	10%
South West	2	£1,999,484	5%	23	£12,490,739	13%
West Midlands	2	£2,948,924	5%	20	£10,170,319	11.5%
Yorkshire and the Humber	4	£3,972,633	11%	15	£12,354,036	8.5%
Total	38	£29,829,972	100%	178⁶	£118,432,680	100%

- **Deprivation and asset location** - According to the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation rankings⁷, 24 of the 38 successful applications (63%) are located in the 20% most deprived areas nationally. In comparison only 4 applications are located in the 20% least deprived areas nationally.

⁶ Note: the total number awarded and rejected do not equal the total of applicants because 3 applicants withdrew and one was not UK-based.

⁷ Seven Domain Indices (income, employment, health, education, crime, living environment and barriers to housing and services) are measured and combined into a single Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Each Index is presented as a score and a national rank. There are 32,482 SOAs in England; the most deprived has a rank of 1 and the least deprived a rank of 32,482.

- **Diversity of activities and functions** - The majority of the descriptions of the community assets revolved around how the projects would provide a community 'hub', 'facility', 'centre' or 'building'. This meant slightly different things in different contexts but there were some common themes and important variations. Most of the projects are providing office and meeting space for local voluntary and community organisations. A few projects have a focus on particular organisations, such as social enterprises. Others are focused on supporting the organisations using the space, as well as providing accommodation for them. These might be called incubators. There were also some focused on specific sectors or specific user groups such as Creative and cultural industries, Health and wellbeing, Young and Old people, or Disabled people. Others are aiming to be a 'one-stop-shop' for local services.

Emerging project typologies

We reviewed the 38 in-principle award projects to look at emerging project typologies. Using typologies will enable us to undertake more nuanced analysis and ultimately to provide insights and lessons to groups wishing to take on projects which have similar characteristics. The typologies will also be useful in structuring the content and project groups for the learning workshops in Strand 2.

As a starting point we have suggested that the 38 projects be grouped by '**building type**' and practice and lessons be distilled on this basis. This is based on the assumption that there are particular characteristics of buildings which have implications for how far they can be refurbished and run by a third sector organisation in a way which is sustainable in the longer-term. The table below shows the division of projects according to their existing building type.

Building type	No. of projects
Purpose-built community centre/ facility	17
Ex-commercial	6
Ex-civic (e.g. library)	6
Ex-school	4
Ex-residential	3
Ex-religious	2
TOTAL	38

We are also exploring the relevance of grouping those buildings that are included in the national List of buildings of architectural merit, and those situated in areas designated as deprived, for the following reasons:

- **Architectural Listing:** the refurbishment and ongoing management of a Listed building requires particular design and project management skills and ways of dealing with the extra costs involved. Enabling the four Listed buildings among the 38 to interact as a group will help us

compare different ways of dealing with the challenges inherent in such buildings.

- **Deprived area:** Where the building being transferred is located is likely to have a bearing on its ongoing financial and operational sustainability. In particular, buildings situated in areas of severe deprivation may struggle to tap into sufficient levels of disposable income for services, room hire, etc. Conversely those assets located either in urban non-deprived areas and rural areas may be less able to tap into government funds allocated to address urban deprivation and disadvantage.

Participant Feedback

To gain projects' perspectives on the operation and impacts of the programme to date, we conducted telephone interviews with the lead partner from 35 of the 38 projects⁸.

- **Appropriateness of application timescales** – In terms of submitting all application related documentation, 47% of lead partners felt that there was not enough time; 44% of lead partners felt that the timescales were workable; and 9% of lead partners felt that the timescales gave them more than enough time.
- **Number of dedicated staff** - 49% of organisations said they have between 1 and 5 paid employees working on the Community Assets programme project. Significantly, given the detailed requirements and expectations associated with the application process, 24% of organisations have no dedicated staff assigned to the project, relying instead on volunteers and part-time staff members.
- **Partnership arrangements** - 87% of partnerships existed before the announcement of the Programme, with 70% of these having a pre-existing relationship of more than two years. 13% were new partnerships established specifically in response to the Programme.
- **Securing match funding** - As a result of Community Assets programme funding 82% of the projects have secured additional funding. For most projects the biggest non-BIG funder is the local authority, followed by charitable trusts and foundations.
- **Anticipated benefits arising from the asset** – Over the next three years projects saw the major benefits accruing from the asset transfer process as: being more operationally secure; being able to reach

⁸ Interviews were not able to be arranged in the timescale with the three remaining projects. These will be undertaken and fed into future strands.

additional communities; and being able to expand existing projects and activities.

- **Engagement beyond the asset transfer partnership** - 71% of TSO lead partners believe that there is genuine engagement with most of the local community in developing the community asset, compared to 62% of LAs.
- **Value and use of the support programme:**
 - **Amount of support** – 84% of the TSO lead partners required support, with 42% needing “a lot”. No LA lead partner required “a lot” of support, with just over 50% not requiring any support.
 - **Type of support** – TSOs needed most help with legal issues (50%) whilst local authorities needed most help with developing the business plan (58%). The support requested from BIG was overwhelmingly around legal issues, particularly in relation to clarifying terms and conditions included in the application documents. Developing the business plan was the most requested support requested from the DTA.
 - **Quality of support** - 65% of organisations felt that the support provided by the DTA was “excellent” or “very good”. 67% were very satisfied with the support provided by the Big Lottery Fund, scoring it as “excellent” or “very good”.
 - **Suggested improvements** - Earlier involvement of the support providers; sample project documentation (e.g. template for a partnership agreement) to be made available early in the process.

Stakeholder Consultation

To help refine our evaluation, as well as gain insights into the broader policy agenda of asset transfer and community empowerment, we interviewed ten senior figures and held a workshop with policy developers and practitioners (see appendix for names).

The consultation highlighted a number of issues that the stakeholders felt the evaluation should consider. These are summarised below. The next stage will be to reflect on these issues with BIG, the OTS and the evaluation steering group.

- The connections and relationships of the programme to other asset transfer, empowerment policies and programmes and how learning and sharing might be exchanged across these different interventions.
- The tensions between mission and money – to what extent TSOs are able to respond to the needs of the local community at the same time as needing to generate a surplus in order to become financially sustainable.

- The need to distinguish between and then explore the viability and deliverability of a project's business plan and the robustness and capacity of the asset receiving TSO to make the plans a reality.
- The extent to which the asset transfer process empowers the TSO receiving the asset as well the wider community it serves.
- The capacity and capability of the TSO receiving the asset to engage with and respond to their many different and diverse stakeholders, partners and users.
- The extent to which the requirement for local authorities and TSOs to work jointly at every stage of the process results in positive cultural change, particularly within the local authorities.
- The degree to which the programme's structure and timescales are can accommodate the often non-linear development of grass-roots enterprise.
- The need to ensure that the concept of community empowerment is taken to include such issues as associational life and social capital, as well as what some consider to be a narrower government focus on efficient public services and democratic participation.
- The approaches adopted by TSOs receiving the assets to maintain an appropriate balance between independence from and involvement with the local authority, for example, whether the local authority should be represented on the management committee of the transferred asset.

6. Initial Reflections

Our initial reflections based on the findings are presented around the three programme outcomes of the Community Assets Programme. This recognises the need to frame the evaluation in terms of the ultimate aspirations of the programme, although we acknowledge that the programme outcomes will not be achieved in the short term.

Local third sector organisations have greater security and independence, and are better able to meet the needs of the communities they serve

The support programme is valued and used

The support programme is emerging as an important element that adds value to the Community Assets Programme. The high levels of support requested and the high satisfaction levels amongst partners with both DTA and BIG demonstrates this.

The ongoing support provided through the programme is viewed by stakeholders and programme participants as crucial to building the capacity, independence and sustainability of third sector organisations.

Strong demand for business and financial planning support

The significant demand for developing business and financial plans suggests that there may be benefits within Strand 2 in organising further discussions about the issues and challenges of business planning and achieving financial security as part of the asset transfer process.

Exploring other types of funding and finance sources

Our experience and other evidence⁹ suggests that exploring other forms of finance – loan, quasi-equity and patient capital – in addition to grant finance will be important for projects as they develop their financial sustainability strategies. Whilst most of the projects are accessing additional match grant funding in addition to that from the Community Assets programme, none are accessing non grant funding. The reasons behind this could be explored further in Strand 2.

⁹ For example, see the recent evaluation of the Adventure Capital Fund.

Communities have more access to better quality facilities that respond to their needs

Given that the projects are not on the ground yet, the findings in relation to this outcome are aspirational rather than based on real experience.

Assets as local facilitators and exchange places

In addition to delivering discrete projects and services, many of the partners emphasise how the asset will act as a community 'hub', 'facility', and 'space' for different interests to come together and exchange experiences. Most of the assets will be providing office and meeting space for voluntary and community sector organisations and in some instances for public sector service deliverers, e.g. PCT. This illustrates the potential for the assets to support the development of other organisations and services as well as the asset 'owner' itself.

Serving a rich diversity of communities

The programme has a rich mix of organisations and projects in its portfolio. As projects move through the programme, this mix will offer great opportunities to share and compare examples of good and innovative practice. The evaluation will continue to explore how the different approaches are responding to the needs of different communities – and in particular how more targeted approaches are not excluding or ignoring other needs and interests.

There is more effective partnership working between local authorities and the third sector

Partners are working well together

In most cases both local authorities and the TSOs had similarly positive perspectives on how well their partnerships are working. In the future we will explore the characteristics of strong partnership leadership and whether this is viewed differently by TSOs and LAs; and how the perceptions of partnership working change over time.

Focused on partnerships that are ready for asset transfer

The majority of partnerships existed before the programme was announced. These findings reflect the nature and structure of the Community Assets Programme, i.e. providing capital funding for the refurbishment process. The programme's design prioritises not only existing partnerships but those that are ready for asset transfer rather than less established partnerships which may require more nurturing and developmental support before they are ready.

Moving forward, we will explore whether there are differences in performance and experience between the majority group of pre-existing partnerships and the small number of new partnerships formed specifically to apply to the programme.

Need to reach out beyond the partnership

For approximately a third of the projects there appear to be remaining challenges in engaging with the wider community in which the assets sits, making links with other regeneration and community empowerment work taking place in the area, and in communicating the activities of the partnership. It is notable that these challenges relate to how the projects look out and connect beyond the specific building being transferred. Given that many of the projects see their buildings as operating as hubs and meeting places for other activities overcoming these challenges will be critical. How these are being addressed will be explored in more detail in Strand 2.

Is there an ideal asset transfer model and process?

We are already witnessing instances of different asset transfer journeys being adopted in different situations. As the stakeholder consultation highlighted, the dynamics of the partnership relationships, the range of services and purposes of the projects, and the varied history of projects make it important that the evaluation reflects on and draws out the diversity of experiences, as well as any commonalities.

Reflecting this, developing an 'ideal' asset transfer model will perhaps be more about developing a 'menu' of good practice elements that can be chosen as appropriate, rather than prescribing a set process. In particular, future strands will explore whether there are fundamental elements that need be present to ensure that any asset transfer process operates effectively and efficiently.

Community Assets as a programme and process

With an eight-week period between the publication of guidance and submission of the initial plan, then a six-month period for approved projects to prepare their detailed Capital Delivery Plans (CDPs), the timeframes were challenging and naturally favoured those projects with well-established partnerships and pre-existing plans for the asset. Consideration of the impacts of the programme's timescales and how they affected projects' experiences of the process will be explored further in future strands.

The process may have favoured projects that were considered 'easier' to deliver. This may have had an effect on the number of 'innovative' schemes and variation in types of building featured. Our future work will consider the extent to which projects would or would not have progressed without Community Assets support.

7. Appendices

Consultation participants

Sylvia Brown,	Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
Jim Ross,	Association of Chief Estates Surveyors (ACES)
Andrew Robinson,	CCLA
David Bentley,	CIPFA/ IPF Asset Management Network
Charles Woodd,	Department of Communities and Local Government
Annemarie Naylor,	Development Trust Association
Sally Cooke,	Local Government Association
Mark Parker,	bassac
Ruth Townsley,	bassac
Sue Peters,	Adventure Capital Fund/ Futurebuilders (
Ben Hughes,	BASSAC
David Tyler,	Community Matters
Graham Willmington,	Community Matters
Tim Pope,	DCLG
Hugo Rolo,	Development Trust Association
Stephen Thake,	London Metropolitan University
Neil Cleeveley,	NAVCA
Dhara Vyas,	NCVO
Neil Smith,	OTS-Cabinet Office

Project baseline survey script

Explanation of Rocket Science's role as evaluator

Script: We have been commissioned by the Big Lottery to evaluate the Community Assets Fund. Our role is to assess the whole programme independently, which includes the application process, the support programme, the partnerships and the impact the funding has on the ability of community groups to meet the needs of local communities.

Script: Our notes say that you are working with PARTNER to develop a BUILDING TYPE for PROPOSED USE. This first set of questions is about your organisation.

About the organisation

Q: Since you began this process has your grant size changed?

No

Yes, increased by:

£1-5,000
 £5-10,000
 £10-20,000
 £20-50,000
 More

Yes, decreased by:

£1-5,000
 £5-10,000
 £10-20,000
 £20-50,000
 More

Q: Are you also getting money from elsewhere for this project?

No

Yes, from:

Local authority
 Regional Development Agency
 Third sector funder (FutureBuilders, CapacityBuilders, community bank)
 Charitable trusts/ foundations
 Multiple sources

Q: How much?

£10-50,000
 £50-100,000
 £100-250,000

£250-500,000

More

Q: What percentage is this of the total funds for the project?

Q: Did your partnership already exist before the application to the Community Assets Fund or did you form it specifically to apply?

Longstanding pre-existing relationship (>2 years)

Pre-existing relationship (<2 years)

No pre-existing relationship

Q: How many PT/FT employees do you have at the moment?

1-10

10-20

20-30

More

Q: And how many volunteers?

1-10

10-20

20-30

More

Q: Is there anything else that has changed about your project since the application that you'd like to highlight to us?

About the organisation's experience with the CAF programme

Q: Can you tell me a little about your project objectives at the start of this programme and whether they have changed?

Objective (insert from profiles)	Change	Progress	Actions arising/ issues

Q: How did you find working to the programme timescales?

More than enough time

Enough time

Not enough time

Q: How confident do you feel about the future of the project as you head towards stage 2?

Very confident

Quite confident

A bit worried
Nervous
Very anxious

Support from DTA support programme

Script: the DTA has been providing support to the partnerships through the process of putting together the capital development plans.

Q: Quantity – how much support did you need?

A lot
A bit
Not much

Q: Quantity – was the amount of support available to you sufficient?

Yes
No

Q: Detail – what kind of support did you need?

Legal issues
Planning issues
Dealing with the partners
Developing the business plan
Other (please detail)

Q: Quality – how good was the support provided?

Excellent
Very good
Satisfactory
Not great
Poor

Q: Quality – why have you given the support the score of excellent/ very good/ satisfactory/ not great/ poor?

Prompt: were the case managers knowledgeable, prompt in responding, provide the right information.

Q: Do you anticipate needing continuing support in the next couple of years and in which areas?

Yes
No

Areas: Legal issues
Planning issues
Dealing with the partners
Developing the business plan
Other (please detail)

Support from BLF

Q: Quantity – how much support did you need?

Q: Detail – what kind of support did you need?

- Legal issues
- Planning issues
- Dealing with the partners
- Developing the business plan

Q: Quality – how good was the support provided?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Satisfactory
- Not great
- Poor

Q: Quality – what makes you give the BLF support this score?

Community empowerment impacts

Script: In this final section we want to get some thoughts from you about how the programme will affect your organisation and your local community.

Instruction: two ticks for an area of priority
 one tick for an area of interest
 no ticks if not mentioned or not important

Q: looking to the future, how do you think your organisation will have changed in the next 12 months?

- Have a base
- Be more secure
- Expand current services
- Deliver different services
- Reach additional communities
- Increase numbers of volunteers
- Have a more secure income stream
- Deliver (or deliver more) public sector contracts
- Build the skills and capacity of current staff and volunteers
- Improved relations/ reputation with the LA and other local stakeholders
- Other: _____

Q: And how do you think your organisation will have changed in the next three years?

- Have a base
- Be more secure
- Employ people
- Be delivering services
- Expand current services
- Deliver different services
- Reach additional communities
- Increase numbers of volunteers
- Have a more secure income stream

Deliver (or deliver more) public sector contracts
Build the skills and capacity of current staff and volunteers
Improved relations/ reputation with the LA and other local stakeholders
Other: _____

Q: What changes in the neighbourhood do you anticipate over the coming months and years?

Partnership Scorecard For Community Assets Programme

PERSONAL	1	2	3	4	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have no knowledge of how the CAF works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have little knowledge of how the CAF works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know the basics about how the CAF works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a fairly clear idea about how the CAF works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a detailed and up-to-date understanding of how the CAF works
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have no understanding of the objectives of this project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have little understanding of the objectives of this project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a basic understanding of the objectives of this project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a fairly clear understanding of the objectives of this project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a very clear understanding of the objectives of this project
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I hold out no hope of this project achieving its objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have little hope of this project achieving its objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have some hope of this project achieving its objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have fairly high hopes of this project achieving its objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have complete faith in this project achieving its objectives

PARTNERSHIP	1	2	3	4	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners do not have clear idea of their expected role or contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few of partners have rough idea of expected role and contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of partners have a rough idea of expected role and contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the partners have a clear idea of expected role and contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each of partners is clear about the role it should play and the contribution it should be making
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of the partners is represented by people who can take decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few of the partners are represented by people who can take decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many of the partners are represented by people who can take decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the partners are represented by people who can take decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the partners are represented by people who can take decisions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership is not led in a clear, focused or facilitative way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership is occasionally led in a way that is clear, focused and facilitative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership is sometimes led in a way that is clear, focused and facilitative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership is usually led in a way that is clear, focused and facilitative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership is always led in a clear and focused way which facilitates effective contribution and achievement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners have made no investment in the development of the partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners have made some investment in the development of the partnership and in understanding what will make the partnership effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners have made some investment in the development of the partnership and this has improved its effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of partners have invested time and effort in understanding what will make the partnership work and this has improved its effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All partners have invested considerable time and effort in understanding what will make the partnership work and this has significantly improved its effectiveness
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership has not developed any systematic approach to internal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership has a few elements of an internal communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership has some elements of an internal communications system but it used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership has most of the elements of an internal communications system and it is used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership has developed very effective ways of communicating between members and

	communication	system but it is not often used	infrequently	regularly	uses this actively
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership does not communicate its purpose and achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership occasionally communicates its purpose and achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership sometimes communicates its purpose and achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership regularly communicates its purpose and achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership effectively communicates with stakeholders about its purpose and achievements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no obvious engagement with any of the local community in developing the community asset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a variable level of engagement with some of the local community in developing the community asset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is genuine engagement with some of the local community in developing the community asset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is genuine engagement with most of the local community in developing the community asset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is genuine engagement with all the local community in developing the community asset

FUTURE	1	2	3	4	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't think the partnership will ever be able to develop any links or alignment with other regeneration and community empowerment work in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think that the partnership will occasionally be able to develop some links and alignment with other regeneration and community empowerment work in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think that the partnership will sometimes be able to develop links and alignment with other regeneration and community empowerment work in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think that the partnership will usually be able to develop fairly coherent links and clear alignment with other regeneration and community empowerment work in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think that the partnership will always be able to develop coherent links and clear alignment with other regeneration and community empowerment work in the area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership will not have the opportunity to review its progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership will sometimes have the opportunity to review its progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership will regularly have the opportunity to review its progress in an ad hoc way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership will regularly have the opportunity to review its progress in a systematic way but this will not always lead to refinement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership will regularly have the opportunity to review its progress against its objectives and targets and refine its actions and focus accordingly