

**MANY
NEIGHBOURHOODS,
ONE CITY**

A Discussion Document of phase one



Photo credit: Alex Brenner, Locality, Wellspring Settlement Alex Brenner

April 2022

Authors: Jack Nicholls, Cami Straatman, Morag McDermont, Seb Hyland Ward, Ellie Walls

Corresponding author: jack.nicholls@bristol.ac.uk

With thanks to all the Community Anchor Organisations who took part in the research and generously provided their time and the images included in this report.

Thanks to the support and resources from the Social Justice Project; the Professional Liaison Network, Faculty of Social Sciences and Law; the PVC Research Strategic Fund; and the University of Bristol Law School.

Contents

1. Forward	3
2. A document for discussion	5
3. Introduction: origins and aims of Many Neighbourhoods, One City	6
4. Methodology – collaboration through sense-making	7
5. CAO’s understanding of economic development	9
4.1 Resistance to standard economic development	9
4.2 Building a favourable context for economic development: health, wellbeing and meeting necessities	11
4.3 Economic development in practice: Employment support, confidence and capability enhancement	11
4.4 Economic development in practice: Housing, area development and placemaking	13
4.5 A conceptualisation of economic development as ‘community building’	15
6. How Community Anchor Organisations know communities	16
5.1 The deep roots and enmeshment of CAOs	16
5.2 Conversation and consultation	17
5.3 Working and collaborating with other organisations	18
5.4 Access to data and limitations	19
5.5 A clash of knowledges, clash of systems?	20
7. Conclusion	20
8. Appendices	22
7.1 Appendix 1: codes used for mapping	22
7.2 Appendix 2: conceptual mapping	24

Forward

Bristol's community anchor organisations are rooted across our city's many diverse neighbourhoods and are all working together with partners for the unity, strength and success of the city as a whole.

The city's Community Anchor network is delighted to have the opportunity to work with the University of Bristol, through Locality, to use the One City Approach to understand our role in both promoting and developing a socially inclusive economy and contributing to city wide strategy. By working with partners to reset decision making processes, the knowledge, experience and expertise of the city's communities and neighbourhoods that are embedded in the Community Anchor organisations could become an important element in both resource allocation and decision making. There is an opportunity with the release of this report to supercharge the One City Approach and drive forward in collaboration with the City Office and other decision makers the recommendations made in this report.

The community anchor network in Bristol played a vital role in supporting the communities that were hardest hit by the pandemic, working in partnership with the Council and others to ensure that the people who continue to be most in need are supported and remain connected. We are the first port of call from many in the neighbourhoods

we serve, because we've always been there both to celebrate local successes and weather the crises our communities have faced- over many decades. In short, we are trusted, respected, and have stood the test of time.

Community anchors are independent community-led organisations. We are multi-purpose and provide joined up solutions to local problems and challenges. We provide much needed services for all ages and ethnicities, from older residents to the very young. Organisations such Southmead Development Trust, Ambition Lawrence Weston, Knowle West Media Centre and my own, Wellspring Settlement, (to name just a few!) are working in the most marginalised wards in the city with a clear focus on promoting equity and the economic and social wellbeing of everyone in their reach. We work tirelessly to amplify our communities' voices and relentlessly to ensure fair access to resources.

We look forward to playing a developing role in the city over the next period.

Joanna Holmes

On behalf of the Bristol Community Anchor network
GEO Wellspring Settlement and previously Chair Locality

As PVC Research for the University of Bristol I was very pleased to be able to support the Many Neighbourhoods, One City research project through our Strategic Research Fund. The approach of the project is very much in line with the University's mission, is to make a positive impact locally and globally by addressing society's greatest challenges through our education, research and the value we place on inclusivity and partnership. The research will form a key building block to support the University in developing an inclusive, equalities and diversity focused set of research partnerships in the City of Bristol into the future.

The research builds on a rich tradition of collaborative and co-produced research between many at the University and community partners throughout the city and beyond. In seeking to understand the ways in which Community Anchor Organisations work to support the social and economic development of neighbourhood communities, the research recognises the intrinsic value of all forms

of expertise and the diverse and embedded forms of knowledge production at work within the city.

Engaging students as researchers in this project furthers our mission to develop a research-rich curriculum where students and academics can create an inclusive culture and can feel a sense of belonging within the city, celebrate the diverse communities that exist in the city.

We look forward to developing deeper and even more collaborative research relationships between community anchor organisations and the university of Bristol. We hope that the resources of the University will be able to continue supporting Bristol's diverse neighbourhoods in making and creating change at neighbourhood and city level, and beyond.

Phil Taylor

University of Bristol, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research





Photo credit: Evoke Pictures and Eastside Community Trust



Photo credit: Evoke Pictures and Eastside Community Trust

1. A document for discussion

This is a document for discussion, not intended as a definitive or final report of the **Many Neighbourhoods, One City** research project. We hope it will provoke reaction, reflection and extend discussion already in progress.

We want to thank the many members of staff from the community anchors who took part in this research for the time they devoted to completing surveys and taking

part in the research; Paul Hassan and Di Robinson for their endless energy, knowledge and insights; and to the Research Steering Group for their wise and helpful direction. It is important to note, however, that the analysis and conclusions drawn are the responsibility of the research team.

The next step is to widen and deepen this analysis and ideas for future action.



2. Introduction: origins and aims of Many Neighbourhoods, One City

Much decision making in Bristol is currently driven by the One City Approach. The basis of the collaborative research project, Many Neighbourhoods, One City (MNOC), is that knowledge from the 'many neighbourhoods' should be instrumental in informing the 'One City'. Whilst many decisions have a city-wide remit and scale, the balance between city governance and neighbourhood governance must periodically be critically examined and rearticulated.

The overarching aim of MNOC is to carry out this rearticulation, and suggest potential redesign of city governance structures to integrate local and community understanding, knowledge and voice. There is inevitable friction between these different levels of governance, between the hyper-local realities of people and the need to aggregate and potentially remove local context to allow for coordinated strategic policy-making. In order for the One City Plan to be truly effective and meaningful it must be rooted to local circumstances and needs. Whilst there is potential for friction between the city scale and the neighbourhood/community, there is an even greater opportunity for synergy if these elements work together more cohesively and effectively. A plan that is felt to be disconnected from local context and different knowledges is likely to become untethered to the needs of its citizens and divorced from a democratic ethic that is generated through bottom-up conduits of local knowledge. We recognise the potential for community anchor organisations (CAOs), as integral elements in the city's social infrastructure, to strengthen conduits of knowledge and enhance local and city governance structures.

Primary research objective: to explore how we can draw on the expertise and knowledge of CAOs in the city to build a picture of what is happening in Bristol, to investigate how communities can join together and work on commonalities and shared interests to establish a collective voice in city decision-making.

Research approach: explorative, collaborative, reflexive, whilst remaining action-oriented; recognising that failure is always possible and can lead to new and better ways of doing and being. A Research Steering Group of academic researchers and CAO practitioners has played an advisory role and guided the research process, alongside regular reporting and discussion in the Social Justice Project.

After an initial mapping exercise (see methodology and separate working document) through a survey of 14 CAOs, we focused on two research aims:

Research aim 1: *To identify alternative forms of economic development generated at neighbourhood level by CAOs.*

- What does economic development mean for CAOs working in the neighbourhoods and communities?
- What similarities and differences are there between CAOs understanding of economic development?
- Are their shared interests between CAOs that can build coalitions?

Research aim 2: *Investigate the relationship between CAOs and their local communities.*

- How do CAOs gain knowledge about the communities they work with?
- How do CAOs respond to needs identified and build strategies based on insight and knowledge of Bristol's diverse communities?
- How do CAOs engage the community in their responses (services and activities)?

In the last section of this report we identify three possible fields and /or initiatives which would enable the CAOs and UoB to continue working in with the ethos of collaboration, taking projects and ideas forward and co-developing research and actions.



Photo credit: Docklands Centre

3. Methodology – collaboration through sense-making

Given the explorative, collaborative and reflexive approach we sought throughout to establish a dialogue between academic researchers and CAO practitioners. We adopted what we termed as a ‘sense-making’ approach, where researchers collected data from CAOs through a survey and interviews, analysed the data and shared insights with the Research Steering Group,¹ the Social Justice Project, the wider Locality SW group. Through these periodic meetings and workshops we created discussion and reflection and feedback which influenced and shifted the direction of the research.

Stage one was to identify what work CAOs were already doing in their communities. This involved drawing on survey criteria/questions that had been shared with CAOs for a previous research effort (Vivid Regeneration, 2017²). The questions included in the survey were thematically grouped through a coding process in which responses are deconstructed and assigned a label (‘code’), allowing for the grouping of themes and the identification of patterns across CAOs operations. The coding of the survey responses led to two distinct datasets: one captured CAOs’ sense of purpose and another included the services and activities that CAOs offer. The full list of activities codes is given in Appendix 1.

The second stage involved a conceptual mapping exercise of the similar themes identified from the coding process. This generated further insight on the possible motives of CAOs and the translation of aims into practice. Insights from this mapping exercise were fed back to the wider CAOs at a Locality meeting, and to a Steering Group meeting. Appendix 2 depicts a stage of this conceptual mapping and includes some of the CAOs’ activities grouped by coding themes. The five high-level themes were identified associated with CAOs sense of purpose:

1. Purpose of CAOs: Inclusivity, empowerment, and improving wellbeing to enhance capabilities in the area for everyone/entire community.
2. Facilitating community action (self-sufficiency).
3. Support other smaller community organisations.
4. Related: Enabling a strong local community network (working with other organisations and local residents).
5. Coordinate opportunities for the local community: both in the formal and informal economy.

¹ Steering Group members: Paul Hassan (Locality); Joanna Holmes (Wellspring Settlement); Lucie Martin-Jones (WECIL); Amy Kinnear (Southmead CDT); Di Robinson (independent consultant working for Locality); Helen Manchester (University of Bristol)

² ‘Research into the importance of Bristol’s Community Anchor Organisations and the role that Quartet Community Foundation can play in supporting their future development’, Vivid Regeneration 2017.



Photo credit: Ibolya Feher, Knowle West Media Centre



The Steering Group decided to focus stage three on a case study of local economic development activities of CAOs, with the aim of investigating the social and community-oriented dimensions of local economic development. The coding datasets were analysed for insights on economic development along with relevant activities listed on CAOs websites and in end of year reports. The second image included in Appendix 2 depicts a whiteboard sketch of our attempt to deconstruct what 'informal economic development' means in the context of CAOs' activities.

Stage four was to carry out a qualitative data gathering exercise that had two elements:

- i. Semi-structured hour-long interviews with 19 CAO employees (largely CEOs). Five topic areas were considered:
 - » Social cohesion, community building and inclusion
 - » Employment support and capability enhancement
 - » Housing and area development
 - » Access to data
 - » The general idea of economic development
- ii. CAO workshop on September 30th, which was an opportunity for researchers to feed back to the CAOs and for CAOs to ask questions. The workshop was also a form of data gathering through focus group discussions.
 - » 21 attendees, including researchers and steering group members.

» The workshop included an update on the research process:

- 1) what research steps had been taken to date, how this workshop would be treated as part of the data collection, and what further steps would be taken, including continuing interviews and feeding all these data and findings back to the CAOs in a report around Christmas.
- 2) an overview of the main aims underpinning the research on local economic development and investigating the relationships between CAOs and their communities.

The main points of interest that flowed out of the workshop were the need to build and invest in community relationships; the importance of understanding communities' needs on a personal level; the value of informal and accessible spaces and personal connections; the importance of social development in relation to economic development; the necessity of changing the ways in which funders perceive 'success' or 'needs'; and differing narratives around area regeneration and socio-economic exclusion.

In the sections that follow we draw primarily on the data collected in stage four, the interviews, workshop and other forms of feedback. At the Spring 2022 workshop we will recap on the datasets drawn from the mapping exercise in stage two, which will provide more insight into the possible areas and fields of collaboration between neighbourhoods and CAOs.



Photo credit: Docklands Centre



Photo credit: Ibolya Feher, Knowle West Media Centre

4. CAO's understanding of economic development

4.1. Resistance to standard economic development

“ There is a tendency with economics to think about money, growth, and employment. This is all part of it, but it is not the end game... And there's been a real switch in the narrative of economic development since the pandemic to focus much more on wellbeing and health

Anya Mulcahy-Bowman (Wellspring Settlement)

There was a sense from the interviews that the key metrics and indicators that are used for standard economic development run counter to CAO's core social aims, funding, size, and/or focus of the organisation. However, 'economic development' taken as a more socially sensitive activity that is tied to social stability, wellbeing and inclusion was seen as a key feature of several CAO's work. Indeed, economic and social/wellbeing should not be treated as mutually exclusive but are umbilically bound together.

“ They are intrinsically linked: the economic and the wellbeing. It is about the journey

Lucy Holburn (Knowle West Alliance)

Our 'sense-making' approach first led us to distinguish between 'hard' or formal economic development, and 'soft' or informal economic development. This distinction draws attention to activities and aims that are more socially driven (soft); for example, where the primary

aim of a CAO service might be to support an individual through employment skills development, or providing free childcare and thereby enabling a parent or guardian to work; and those that are focused directly on income generation and investment in the local area (hard).

CAOs have strong social missions but also tend to aim for a set of diverse income streams, for example by combining rental income, traded income, and income from community projects with money from grants and other forms of fundraising or commissioned services. Caution should be applied in the use of this hard/soft distinction, however, as it can blur the focus between the economic development of a CAO and the economic development of an area. While the two maybe related - and are both a concern for CAOs - they should be treated as separate.

'Hard economic development'

Diverse income streams help CAOs maintain a sustainable income, making them more resilient³ when one source of income/funding falls away. Both the diversity of income streams and the possible conditions attached to funding have an impact on the agency CAOs have over the way they spend money or deliver their services, and even how much they can be involved in other collaborations or indeed engage with the One City Approach.

In terms of 'local investment', CAOs referred to several forms of direct and indirect monetary investment activities; from drawing resources into the local area, investing in community development projects, aiming to spend money in the area where possible, sustaining community assets, and employing local people. The desire to keep money circulating in the locally was expressed often in the interviews.

³ For some ideas of what organisational resilience means in practice, see: ['Organisational Resilience in Third Sector Youth Organisations in Bristol'](#)

“ We are trying to keep money in the local area and contract local people. Our focus is to make sure that we are working with local people, local artists, local organisations...”

LaToyah McAllister-Jones (St Paul’s Carnival)

‘Soft economic development’

The term investment is used here to talk about quantitative investment – money – but CAOs ‘invest’ in their local communities in many other ways. This soft, or informal, side of economic development was strongly present in the data.



Soft economic development involves strengthening a persons’ socio-economic position through various forms of support and training. Providing this support for individuals is a core aim and purpose for many CAOs, but they also use their capacity to organise and strengthen the collective socio-economic agency of neighbourhoods, communities and other groups that they work. This community scale economic development often takes place through championing a community’s needs and concerns; channelling voices and carrying out ongoing conversations, consultation, and research into local needs. CAOs stressed the importance of engaging the community in their development; whether it was by facilitating community discussions and engagement in local development projects, supporting resident-led groups and activities, taking a user-led approach to

service design, or simply holding space for ongoing conversations with local residents and service users.

The position CAOs occupy in a the city’s social infrastructure is also of importance. The concerns of one neighbourhood may not be shared by another. What forms of social value are prioritised is partly dependent on local context, and CAOs are well placed to respond to these varying needs due to their embedded position within the neighbourhoods and communities they work with.

A more nuanced approach needed

The CAOs who took part in the research generally resisted the application of hard economic indicators in the evaluation of their activities - they also opposed a strong focus on employment support and financial matters in favour of more attention to their social role, the efforts to empower community members, enhance their confidence and social capital, and engage in ongoing community building work.

Some of the interviewees were slightly annoyed or confused by the questions asked on economic matters and employment, stressing the importance of a community-centred, individually catered approach to these matters where conversations, human connection, and trust and relationship building were key.

While many CAOs did not align themselves with hard economic development, when thinking this through as part of the interview, they realised that they do carry out some activities that fall under this banner. We see value in the continuation of a shared reflective process where CAOs come together to re-purpose the meaning of ‘economic development’, amplifying the social over the economic. The shared resistance to standard economic development could also form a loose coalition of Bristol’s CAOs that aims to collectively push back against economic indicators.

This re-orientation of ‘socio-economic’ towards the social, draws attention to important social values and aims that should be present in city strategy, policy, and decision-making. Nevertheless, the insights that we offer below are a first attempt to try and understand an alternative form of economic development that is realised through the practice of CAOs. Further research is required to substantiate and deepen the account that is presented in this report.

The following three sections focus in on specific forms of economic development in practice as operationalised through CAO’s practice to give a sense of the integrated (enmeshed) nature of CAO’s work.



Photo credit: The West of England Centre for Inclusive Living

4.2. Building a favourable context for economic development: health, wellbeing and meeting necessities

A core element of CAO's work is to support individuals to lead fulfilled lives. This support is often focused on building individual's skills, attributes and utilising support networks so that the person has the capacity to direct their lives. Informing the activities of CAOs is a holistic understanding of wellbeing that combines health, skills and confidence. In this manner, supporting an individual to return to the labour market may not involve a sole focus on employment skills. Rather, many CAOs offer combined services that integrate health, wellbeing and employment training.

“ We invest in people's health and wellbeing to give them confidence and build their skills, so that they can get the jobs they need to support themselves and their families

Heather Williams (Knowle West Health Park)

Ensuring residents have access to basic necessities is also a core aim of CAOs – here necessities mean more than ensuring that food is on the table and includes but is not limited to; adequate and good quality housing, heating, and access to green spaces.

“ Economic development starts with education and the basic necessities for the entire community

Goska Ong (St Werburghs Community Centre)

Several CAOs stressed the importance of the provision of low-cost childcare being a further contextual factor for catalysing economic development. This is particularly the case for single parents in precarious situations in particular need of childcare. Other types of child services are premised on generating peer support and countering parental isolation, such as 'stay and play'.

Providing such necessities is a vital part of creating a favourable context for economic development to be possible whilst reducing the impact of inequality and

broadening access to essential services, especially for marginalised or disadvantaged sectors of the community. CAO's role can be seen as providing a community 'backstop' or 'safety net' that may not be needed by many, but creates greater confidence for struggling members of a community by knowing that support is there in the case that they do need it.

4.3. Economic development in practice: Employment support, confidence and capability enhancement

The majority of CAOs who took part in the research mentioned how they felt that their community members lacked confidence to engage in or enter the labour market or speak up about local and city-wide issues that concern them. To help community members gain confidence, CAOs delivered a wide range of activities including language lessons, coffee mornings, practice interviews, support with day-to-day tasks, education and training programmes and more. The focus on building confidence encompassed the development of skills to empower and motivate people by supporting self-belief, identifying opportunities and increasing trust in their communities, often whilst fostering ongoing relationships between local residents and community workers.

Confidence building was identified as being important for both finding employment and empowering community voices. There are many ways in which CAOs try to build confidence, including offering experience, fostering social integration and community connections, building skills and supporting people to participate in activities and 'get out there'.

“ If people have been unemployed for a long time, they don't have the confidence to go out and search for jobs, so we help them gain the confidence to apply for a job. We practice interview skills with them... And we invest enough time

Abdullahi Farah (Bristol Somali Resource Centre)

For most CAOs, employment support is more about strengthening an individual's social position, building confidence, experience, skills, and a network, than it is about being in employment itself. Some see employment and income as a means towards a different goal; the goal of developing an individual, improving their wellbeing and giving them a sense of purpose. Here, both social and economic agency are central.

“ We look at what people are able to do and work on enhancing those abilities – we first listen to what they want to do and work on that. Many people are not confident in their skills and do not feel competent; they often don't even get to the center of Bristol! So we work on building those soft skills and that confidence

Melanie Monaghan (Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership)

The building of a relationship of trust is critical part of the work of CAOs. It was clear that there is a strong emphasis on conversations and relationship-building to identify people's needs and respond to those rather than aims set by external organisations or funders. Having conversations, getting to know the individual, and talking with them about their needs and their desires for the future are seen as key component of offering support. Time and trust are seen as critical to this process. CAOs note that such relationships cannot be built overnight and their long-term presence in the neighbourhood is key.

“ We get them in and have a chat. The employment worker will sit down and have a cup of tea with them to figure out what they want, what they can do, and what they need

Mark Pepper (Ambition Lawrence Weston)

Being approachable is important to allow such relationships to form. It was reported that people who do not feel at home in professional settings and struggle to get back into employment tend not to flourish in mainstream employment services. Instead, they are more likely to feel comfortable to walk into their local community

centre where they often attend activities, see familiar faces, can ask for help with email-writing and use the facilities on their own terms.

“ We meet people on their own terms and where they are instead of providing specific, formal employment support. People can dip in and out a bit and build a relationship over a longer period of time. It's a gentle form of support that doesn't look for rigid outcomes; it happens on a much more personal timescale

Sam Thomson (The Ardagh Community Trust)

“ We offer a safe and accessible space, very low-barrier and informal, not like normal job centres. We are informal, we are not the system

Steve Sayers (Windmill Hill City Farm)

This emphasis on the importance of relationships, connections, confidence, means that employment support and community building appear to go hand in hand.

“ One of the main things that we do is we create networks between people and organisations that might not have previously been there... We put, you know, it's kind of a bit of a social lubricant, if you like

LaToyah McAllister-Jones (St Paul's Carnival)

In taking a more holistic approach to securing employment, several CAOs also looked at other structural factors that could impact people's access to employment. Several mentioned transport issues as limiting people's mobility and therefore their access to employment. One CAO explained that they organised a community transport service so that residents can travel from the neighbourhood to places of work.

“ We look at all aspects of life and take holistic approach – It is about getting a job AND keeping a job. That means that childcare and other elements like transport need to be addressed too [...] We went to First Bus to prove that there was a case, and they have now provided the bus route to reach places of employment

Mark Pepper (Ambition Lawrence Weston)



4.4. Economic development in practice: Housing, area development and placemaking

CAOs tend to adopt an integrated approach to housing and area development. From a low base, an increasing number of CAOs are involved directly or indirectly in housing development and more are assessing their capacity to engage.

For most CAOs, whilst economic inclusion and affordability are important concerns, they also emphasised that housing and developments should also meet people’s need for community, for beauty, and for social connection. Accordingly, area development, planning and housing are about creating spaces where people want to live, where they want to build relationships and make connections; a space they can identify with and want to invest in because they form attachment to the area and their neighbours. Neighbourhoods are more

than housing estates; people need local shops, transport connections, community spaces, green spaces, activities and opportunities.

“ You can build a load of new developments but if you don’t build other things, such as bus services, then people do not necessarily have access to those services locally

Heather Williams (Knowle West Health Park)

CAOs that liaise with developers or are involved in housing projects stressed the importance of involving the community in the planning process. Some CAOs run community-led housing projects while others foster community conversations and consultation on local developments, which can lead to more positive outcomes than those run by external parties with little to no connection to the neighbourhood. CAOs stress that engaging and involving the community early in developments can help developers consider these diverse needs.

“ In the broader sense it feels like they are just sticking houses wherever they can, just sticking people in boxes. No added infrastructure, no social support, all profit driven with no concern of what people want from a house and a neighbourhood. These tower blocks are rubbish!

Simon Hankins (BS3 Community Development)

Many CAOs recognise that placemaking is more than area development and is related to social and economic inclusion. The topic of gentrification came up in several interviews and CAOs noted the importance of neighbourhoods remaining accessible and pleasant for those less economically well off.

The tension between regenerating and ‘upgrading’ areas and keeping them accessible was a point of concern for CAOs. Several stated that they are not opposed to people with more social and financial capital moving into an area, as they believe that it can bring opportunities, but these CAOs were concerned over the potential exclusion of those less empowered.



Photo credit: The West of England Centre for Inclusive Living

“ We’ll have some of that gentrification! We’ll have some of your posh coffeeshops! But we need to be careful and find the right balance, not too much of one thing and not too much of the other. We try to create a more balanced community with people who need support and people who can provide support

Mark Pepper (Ambition Lawrence Weston)

“ We try to recognise the impact of gentrification, but do not have a position statement on it. It’s about recognising the nuance of change that is constant, and it is important to recognise where resource is, where space is, and what can be done with people’s resources. But there is the danger of creating a divide

Stacy Yelland (Eastside Community Trust)

Local letting policies, affordability of housing, and socio-economic empowerment of people are some of the principles CAOs advocate to try and find the right balance.

“ We are keen on having a local lettings policy. Socio-economic diversity is good as long as resources are not concentrated in one group. The council local letting policy will do more to benefit the local people of Lockleaze

Suzanne Wilson (Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust)

An important part of ‘area development’ identified by CAOs is not ‘development’ per se, but supporting existing local businesses and highstreets to enhance and strengthen a local circular economy.

“ We try to support the local economy in a broader sense to ensure that money generated locally stays local and is supportive of the community

Suzanne Wilson (Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust)

Ensuring that the right conditions are in place to enable businesses to set up and flourish was seen to be challenging by CAOs due to the disconnect between funders, developers and the needs and wishes of local communities. There was frustration that CAOs knowledge of the local neighbourhoods was often side-lined when it came to area (re)development.

“ Investments and developments go to organisations and projects that run for a bit but then disappear, or to contractors that come and run a scheme but who employ people from outside the community, so resources are drained away again quickly – we want to keep people and investment circulating in the local area

Amy Kinnear (Southmead Development Trust)

Following the prioritisation of a local areas’ needs over the profitability of a project, the link between economic development and environmental sustainability was also flagged by CAOs, noting that sustainable practice should be a foundation from which to work from.

“ Local economic development has got to be about the green agenda and climate change as guiding force

Steve Sayers (Windmill Hill City Farm)

“ Underpinning this is sustainability, it’s totally key – how we look at sustainable economic models on how people travel around community, to how people’s homes heated, how people look after their local environment

Amy Kinnear (Southmead Development Trust)

While the big picture remains important for CAOs, and many are thinking about how their work relates to global challenges, it is their embedded practice which bridges macro concerns and challenges to the local



Photo credit: Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust

“ Think on global scale but operate on local scale and develop the infrastructure to enable that to happen. We want people to have nice spaces and resources where they live so they don't have to travel and can live their lives in sustainable and enjoyable way

Steve Sayers (Windmill Hill City Farm)

4.5. A conceptualisation of economic development as ‘community building’

The data above demonstrates a diversity of practice of economic development across Bristol's CAOs. Broadly speaking the interviewees suggest that economic development is constituted by inclusive practice;

the prioritisation of wellbeing and the building of confidence and ability for individuals to take part in the economic sphere; and creating channels through which communities can build stronger, socially inclusive and diverse neighbourhoods. We suggest that these could be core conceptual anchors for an understanding of economic development as a form of community building as practiced by CAOs.

To get a sense of the links between these abstract ideals, several interviewees made the case that if individuals are lacking economic stability and power, they are likely to feel excluded from activities and spaces that could improve their wellbeing and social connections. Economic stability is seen as a prerequisite for wellbeing and being able to contribute something positive to the community. One interviewee suggested that individuals with strong social networks and who feel positively encouraged, capable and supported, find it easier to build the necessary confidence to (re)enter the labour market.

“ It’s difficult to engage in community life if you are worrying about paying your bills or feeding your kids. You just have less mental capacity to engage socially

Anya Mulcahy-Bowman (Wellspring Settlement)

“ A huge body of evidence shows that inequity in all its forms leads to social unrest and all its negative connotations. BS3 forms social bonds that reduce inequity and raise community feelings

Simon Hankins (BS3 Community Development)

Community building and inclusion were also identified as inherent to CAOs longer-term ways of working, seen as essential to forming a sense of empowerment or creating a feeling that ‘stuff can happen here’. This fostered positivity increases people’s confidence to start enterprises and invest in the area, and this is supported by the appreciation that there are local shops and initiatives where they can spend their money and contribute to their community.

“ We try to create a culture where people feel that stuff can happen here. At the moment, many people identify more with Filton of the Gloucester Road Area because that’s where they go for cultural stuff. We try to create a self-generating neighbourhood where people feel like they can make things happen and invest in their area, build things and start an enterprise

Suzanne Wilson (Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust)

Taken together, this longer-term approach to community building practised by CAOs should be at the core of any understanding of economic development in a broad and inclusive sense. Moreover, the integration of social

inclusion, wellbeing, economic stability and empowerment generated an overall positive atmosphere that fostered community cohesion, loyalty to the community, confidence, and an enhanced ability to ‘see opportunities’.

One workshop participant offered an interesting conceptual distinction, claiming that there are “two tracks to socio-economic inclusion.” The first track emphasises place-making and bringing communities together to have influence as important for building social cohesion, while the second track, in their view, is concerned with the individual - with how people need personal support, resources, and sometimes a social safety-net to make positive changes and participate in place-making. To put it another way, people who are struggling and in need of support are rarely able to support others, invest in their areas, and ‘build community’.

An energised discussion in the research workshop focused on the importance of good local jobs and circular monetary flows within the local area. The discussion was not limited to physical financial assets but pushed out into an understanding of the social infrastructure that is necessary for community building to be possible.

“ Local economic development actually came up this morning when we were talking about the high street. Many people say ‘oh we need a supermarket’ but local economic development speaks to us as ‘what we actually need is lots of local independent shops’ so that the money stays in the community: so that the money spent here stays here

Lucy Holburn (Knowle West Alliance)

CAOs are deeply embedded in local neighbourhoods. The following section considers how CAOs understand the neighbourhoods and communities they work with, and how they maintain their position of trusted intermediaries operating between the public sphere and local government. The account also starts to build an understanding of how the network of CAOs augments the social infrastructure of the city and how their activities enhance democratic decision-making.





Photo credit: Alex Brenner, Locality, Wellspring Settlement Alex Brenner

5 How Community Anchor Organisations know communities

5.1. The deep roots and enmeshment of CAOs

CAOs often explain their value in terms of local people 'knowing' and 'trusting' them; they are a familiar face. Indeed, CAOs' claim to know the communities in which they work is key to their purpose and existence. They place a strong emphasis on continuing conversations, periodic consultation and an ethic of co-design of services with residents and/or service users to establish long term relationships built on trust. A variety of approaches are employed, but most CAOs stress the importance of listening so they can work towards supporting peoples' everyday needs.

“ Our support really depends on what matters to the individuals that rock up. It is not up to us to tell them what they need but up to them to tell us what they need, and it might require conversations, time, and relationship or trust building for them to open up about needs

Simon Hankins and Ruth Green (BS3 Community development)

Interviewees expressed an intimate and deep knowledge of the neighbourhoods they worked with. The diverse relationships that CAOs maintain with individuals, other organisations and the various communities that co-exist within their areas of interest, indicates how 'enmeshed' CAOs are within their neighbourhoods. Particularly for neighbourhood based organisations, this enmeshment is often associated with a physical space such as a community centre that has multiple uses for a variety of communities pursuing different interests. A community hub where people can explore individual and collective interests can, for example, also function as a centre for religious worship for different faiths – reflecting and highlighting the diversity of the area to increase the positive appreciation of difference and support community cohesion. As one CAO director explained:

“ We are a place where things happen and people come here for that. We've got a great network with local residents, businesses, schools, places of worship... We are a place of worship for all different religions as well. It's very diverse

Goska Ong (St Werburghs Community Centre)

This enmeshment is not only a characteristic of CAOs' relationship with their neighbourhoods but is also a key asset that helps identify people who require support and determine what type of support is needed. Enmeshment blends with community consultation and helps to engage with community members at a personal level to determine the support and services that are required.

“ Our services are demand-led. We try to capture the words people use when requesting support and identify needs based on the requests that come in. We also try to always have a more open in-depth conversation with people about their needs and capacity before they are referred to separate support services

Dominic Ellison (WECIL)

CAOs' deep roots and enmeshment in their neighbourhoods helps them build a hyper local understanding that can be challenging to codify and evidence. The fact that they are so embedded in their communities is a key characteristic that differentiates them from business and statutory services. Their everyday relationships with individuals and groups in the community enables a knowledge and understanding that leads to a sensitivity to a community's concerns. They are part of the community (or communities), not simply responding to it. Without the hyper-local practitioner knowledge and types of support services, many residents' needs would be neglected or overlooked.

“ Our support services are different from what’s already out there in the sense that our volunteers are from the community, they get the area. They all live here and therefore know the needs of the community very well. There is a large variety of advice that they can give, always tailored to each individual, also in terms of the language spoken

Afzal Shah (Wellspring Settlement)

Positive impacts of their work may not fit within simple impact metrics. Indeed, there is a tension between this embedded working that builds a rich tapestry of socio-economic relations and local knowledge, and the aim to articulate the value of this work in short-hand summaries (and our attempt to do so here is fundamentally limited).

5.2. Conversation and consultation

CAOs utilise many forms of co-design, including outreach, user-led engagement and collaborative planning. Much co-produced working is possible because they have accessible ‘space’ in the form of a community centre or hub for people to drop in to seek advice and support.

Consultation often includes heading out to local neighbourhoods to interact with the community on their own turf. For example, going into schools to find out who requires additional support. CAO employees and volunteers meet residents in neighbourhood parks or attend local events and visit shops and supermarkets. In one project, community researchers took a tea trolley around shops and care homes to stimulate discussion about loneliness.

“ Just by being in the heart of the community you pick up a lot of a sense of what’s going on for people, through all the conversations we have, through more structured processes such as the master planning... We also try to co-produce events so that people can have their say in a more structured way

Amy Kinnear (Southmead Development Trust)

Strong emphasis on conversations and relationship building was noted by some, emphasising the need for time and resource to really identify a community’s needs. However, it was also noted that holding open conversations can be challenging. Getting people together all in one space and stimulating discussion is no easy feat; ensuring that the right cultural setting is created and that people have agency to form their own connections within these spaces requires skill. It is also a skill to make people feel comfortable and safe whilst also maintaining a certain distance.

“ We always ask people what they need and want at this moment; what they can do and what they are restricted from doing. We, for example, work with mums from the area and we try to make them feel like they can come and talk to us at the times that are best for them. We do coffee mornings where they can also bring their children to accommodate for their needs and abilities, and we also try to co-produce activities with them around these needs and abilities. They can communicate with us in English, Somali and Arabic so we can have an ongoing and open dialogue

Samira Musse (Barton Hill Activities Club)

Listening and forming a clear understanding of shared community interests can also be challenging for CAOs where conflict is present within or between neighbourhoods. CAOs that operate in areas with more pronounced polarisation of wealth reported that building alliances can be difficult. However, where clarity on a neighbourhood’s needs is clear, a distinct vision can be formed that can be a powerful catalyst for action. This type of neighbourhood vision can be codified, for example, within a Community Development Plan which gives residents confidence that their voices underpin all future projects and development in the neighbourhood.

Many CAOs we spoke with said they tried to avoid models or blueprints – a ‘one size fits all’ approach of community engagement and participation that are often adopted by local councils and city-wide government.



However, the people-intensive practices of holding their space, having people on hand to listen during all opening hours (which can be 12-14 hours a day) is hard work and can lead to burn out. At least one CAO said they were having to fill many staff vacancies because people had had enough and needed to move on.

5.3. Working and collaborating with other organisations

We have said that enmeshment in local (and wider) communities is central to the way CAOs work. CAOs do not work in isolation – they see their role as making and developing connections across the neighbourhood and to nurture and support developing local groupings.

“ People come to us and we ask them: ‘what is the problem?’ and when we understand what the problem is, we try to help them solve the problem. If we cannot solve it, we refer them to other local agencies who are specialised in some kind of support. Like Shelter or the Law Centre

Abdullahi Farah (Bristol Somali Resource Centre)

Several CAOs stressed that they aim to complement existing services or fill the gaps left by other voluntary organisations and a declining welfare state that has faced a decade of cuts. CAOs do not try to reinvent the wheel. If another organisation already offers a set of services that are suitable, they will signpost residents to that organisation or work with them in collaboration.

Buildings can be a resource for working together by providing an open, accessible, high-quality space that local groups can use in a way that works for them. Land and buildings enable CAOs to collaborate with others, bringing in organisations and services – for example, Wellspring Settlement’s Micro Settlement which has enabled the University of Bristol to be located in a diverse neighbourhood.

CAOs can also support the development of new groups in their neighbourhood by providing administrative support, or by holding funding for informally established groups so that they do not need to go through the onerous requirements of becoming a registered charity or other legally constituted body. This social infrastructure allows for the creative development of new community projects by those without organisational structure, enabling groups to exist lightly, without the heaviness of a bureaucratic systems.

The Knowle West Alliance is a formalisation of this desire for collaborative working practices which has been an effective ‘coming together’ that came into its own in response to the pandemic (see Locality’s We Were Made For this report). These collaborations and partnership form

networks above neighbourhood level that can work on concerns and issues that get lost between the hyperlocal and the city levels. Such formalised alliances, however, require considerable time and commitment to identify and work with common ground and build relations. Resources are also key for partnership working. St Werburghs Community Centre considered establishing an Ashley area alliance or a wider East Bristol network which were abandoned in part because all potential partners were small under-resourced organisations with no capacity for working beyond the immediate needs of residents.

5.4. Access to data and limitations

All VCS organisations are required to collect data to meet the conditions of funding. The extent to which they were able to do this and the resources they were able to deploy for this work, however, differs widely across the CAOs. For some, this process is formalised through technologies and databases that capture reporting data on their service users. Very few CAOs had the capacity to explore other public data and utilise it to inform their operations.

“ A lot of our funders measure through numbers, but we are not sure whether that is the best way

Carolyn Hassan (Knowle West Media Centre)

Accessing more data can be tricky. When asked about recording the impact of employment support activities, several CAOs mentioned the struggle to record longer-term impacts. They rely on seeing the visual impact of their work, which is where there can often emerge a disconnect from demands of funders for numbers.

“ We can SEE the changes as they happen. We see, you know, Johnny go to work when he didn't last week, we see someone buy a car, but we don't monitor it. We have the confidence that our activities work

Mark Pepper (Ambition Lawrence Weston)

It has been suggested that there is often a lack of time for reflection and thorough planning during the conception of projects, and that it is not always possible to know in

advance of setting-up the project what the longer-term impacts will be. Pressures of reporting to funders can narrow the scope of project planning and assessing a projects impacts, which can in turn limit the opportunity to address community challenges holistically.

Many of those interviewed wanted to be able to make more use of existing research data about their neighbourhoods to help them shape future strategies and practice. For example, Bristol Somali Resource Centre use phone calls and feedback forms but would like quantitative data on employment and income levels of the community too. For those organisations that do collect data, having the time and resources to analyse and use this data in a way that can influence, and shape organisational development, wider neighbourhood and city governance was challenging.

It is here that collaborations between universities and CAOs can make a difference; they can bring in resource and expertise and they can bring funding, for example, to train and support community researchers to investigate perceived barriers to employment amongst local people.

5.5. A clash of knowledges, clash of systems?

Many interviewees expressed frustration with the demands and limitations of knowledge collection and processing at the levels of city governance and beyond. Some of this was directed at funding organisations (in many cases BCC or health institutions, but also other national-level funders). There was a tension between funders demanding data to 'prove' value, and CAOs often feeling that the data required for funding reports is inappropriate in terms of building relationships with people. For example, above we noted how many utilise visible difference or phone calls, but find this cannot be aligned with requirements for quantification of impact. For CAOs, their informal spaces can generate informal conversations which are more valuable to CAOs than stats and data which are closer to the reality of local residents' lives, enabling them to formulate more appropriate responses.

Locally appropriate knowledge production can be problematic also because of the ways in which we view the city at different levels of jurisdiction. This means that CAO neighbourhoods fall between the cracks. For example, the 'neighbourhood' covered by Ardagh CT spans three city wards, examining data at ward level makes them appear to be an affluent area. However,



Photo credit: Knowle West Alliance

within a mile of the community centre lies an estate with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the UK. The area is not consulted as a totality, and it is very difficult for the CAO in bidding for funding and local support.

Nevertheless, there was a sense from some CAOs that the problems cannot to be fixed by tweaking ward boundaries or methods of data collection – the problem rather was with systems and organisational culture. WECIL's observation about their role in relation to disabled people could be seen as a rallying call for community anchors more widely:

“ We don't fix disabled people to become more employable, we fix the broken system to become better at employing/including disabled people and helping disabled people navigate the system

Dominic Ellison (WECIL)

The distinctive culture of CAOs helps maintain a civil society that is rooted in the many neighbourhoods of Bristol. This civil society is built on trusted relationships and an ethic of care that has formed a social (and civic) infrastructure that establishes a bridge between funders, including the local authorities, and the public. CAO's culture is supportive of community development precisely because it is not hierarchical and bureaucratised; prioritising, rather, the harder to quantify social value that forms and builds communities over economic value. While there is room for various knowledges to flow and operate in city governance, it is useful to be up-front about what is being valued and why. Working with and as part of a neighbourhood is very different to working for and removed from a neighbourhood.

6 Conclusion

The social infrastructure that has formed from CAO's ongoing work in building genuine long-term relationships has led to CAOs becoming embedded in the communities they work with. This 'enmeshed' state has perhaps not been planned or strategized from the get-go. However, their ad hoc or 'uncodified' practice – either as a single organisation or as a collective – garners less recognition than high-level (and often abstract) published plans (such as the One City). Greater recognition of the essential social value of the work that CAOs are doing would help catalyse their role in transforming the city into a place of opportunity that is more inclusive, kinder and is better able to face future challenges. The city-wide social and civic infrastructure supported by CAOs is already doing a lot, but there is potential for it to do much more if the necessary resource and time are made available for the effective co-ordination between the city's CAOs, the city's governance structures, and Bristol's many neighbourhoods.

Many of our interviewees told us that they know that what they do is having a positive impact but that evidencing this impact can be difficult (see above). Unpicking all the connections, relationships, past histories, shared moments and a multitude of interlinking programmes, activities and people, is in many ways an impossible task that negates this enmeshment and leads to an impoverished understanding of what CAOs do. We hope that the insights on economic development and how CAOs know their neighbourhoods presented above show some of the rhizomatic complexity inherent in CAOs' operations. This complexity deserves to be recognised and could be better understood through further exploratory social science. The gains of doing so would be to form real world meanings of the shared purpose and motives that drive CAOs and the identification of current and future practice for progressive transformative change at the neighbourhood and city scales.

Analysis of all the data from MNOC leads us to two overarching questions:

1. How might we understand the re-shaping of community and city-wide networks and the new relations that have emerged between communities and City Hall in response to changing needs and assets of communities?
2. How can a re-vitalised local community decision-making, reshape the spatial and relational governance of the city?

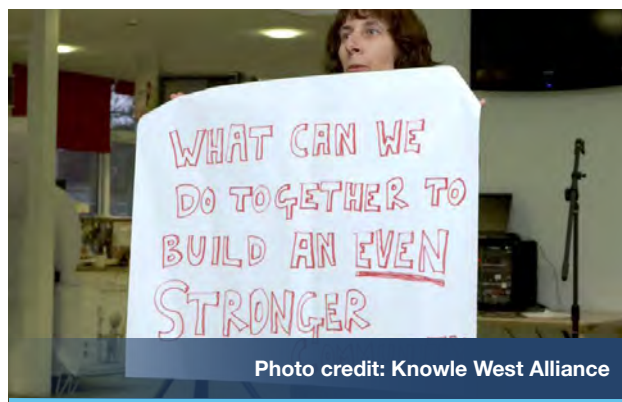


Photo credit: Knowle West Alliance

Some of our initial thoughts to begin to answer these questions:

- Building recognition across Bristol for the day-to-day support that CAOs are providing the many neighbourhoods of Bristol. Amplifying this recognition through shared outputs and utilising their collective insights to intervene in matters of concern.
- To what extent do CAOs want to work within the existing systems of city governance? Are these structures hindering their development? Can CAOs do more of their work collaboratively outside of large institutional structures?
- Continuing to work with intermediaries to help form CAO coalitions of interest. Coalitions could augment the voice of CAOs, and the social infrastructure they support, enabling things to happen that cannot be done by one organisation. There is potential for UoB to support this through collecting and analysing CAO data and insight.
- Recognising the democratic potential of the work of CAOs in understanding neighbourhoods and supporting a space for community concerns to be expressed and formed into a political ask. There is potential to then carry out experimental forms of city-wide CAO decision-making to engage people at the neighbourhood level.
- Deconstructing and reconstructing existing power relations between CAOs and large governance institutions such as the NHS. Both sides have a view of what works and institutional lock-in and perception of their own role in city governance may prevent creative experimentation and productive collaboration that lead to radical futures.



7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: codes used for mapping

Full list of CAO activities and services identified from survey mapping process

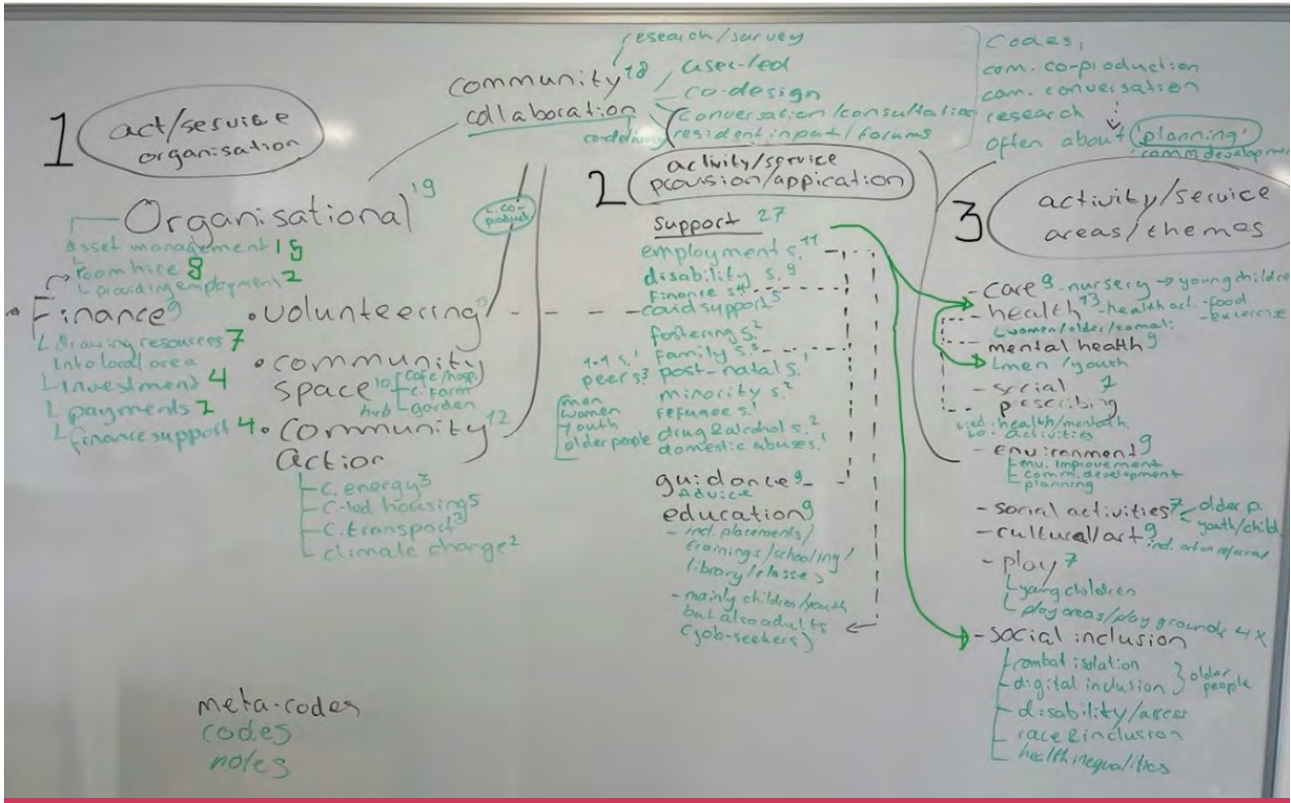
Access	Disability support	Open access support
Advice	Domestic abuse support	Payments
Asset management	Drawing resources into local area	Peer-support
BCC	Drug and alcohol support	Planning
Café/hospitality	Education	Play
Climate change	Employment support	Post-natal support
Collaboration	Environment improvement	Providing employment
Combat isolation	Exercise	Race and inclusion
Community co-production	Family support	Refugee support
Community conversation	Finance support	Research
Community development	Food	Retirement support
Community energy	Fostering support	Room hire
Community farm	Garden	Shop
Community outreach	Health activities	Social activities
Community space	Investment	Social prescribing
Community transport	Library services	Space provision
Community-led housing	Local magazine	Support
Counselling	Low-cost	Volunteering opportunities
Covid support	Mental health services	Youth work
Cultural activities/Art	Minority support	1-1 support
Digital inclusion	Nursery	

Full list of themes for grouped CAO activities and services

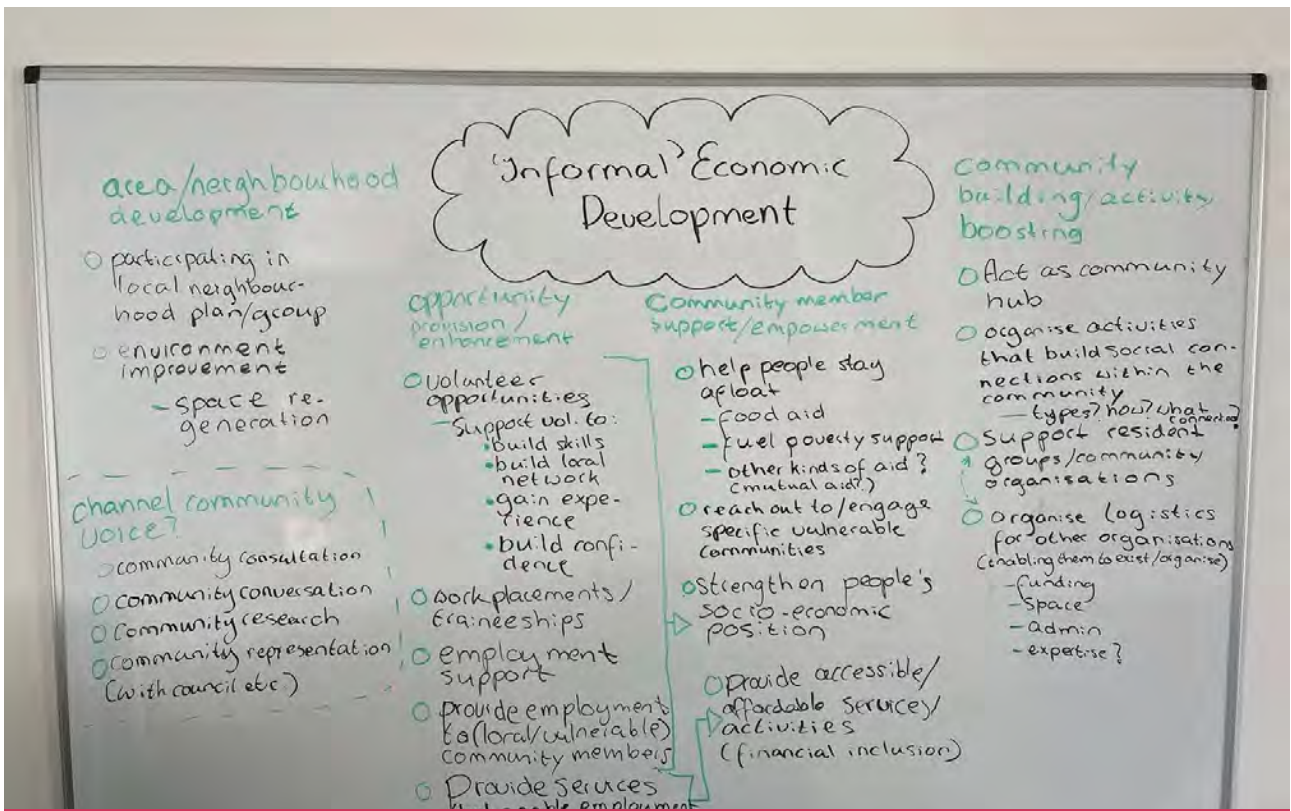
Care	Environment	Play
Community action	Finance	Social activities
Community space	Guidance	Social inclusion
Community collaboration	Health	Social prescribing
Cultural/Art	Mental health	Support
Education	Organisational	Volunteering

7.2 Appendix 2: conceptual mapping

Workings diagram of CAO services and activities



Workings diagram of informal economic development carried out by CAOs



University of
BRISTOL

locality
the power of community

PRAXIS