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YORSPACE : THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY LAND TRUST IN DRIVING COMMUNITY ASSET DEVELOPMENT

WANT TO OWN
A HOME BUT
CAN'T?



WANT TO RUN
A BUSINESS
BUT
STRUGGLE?



WE WANT TO
MAKE YORK
AFFORDABLE



WE NEED YOU
TO REIMAGINE
THE MARKET
WITH US

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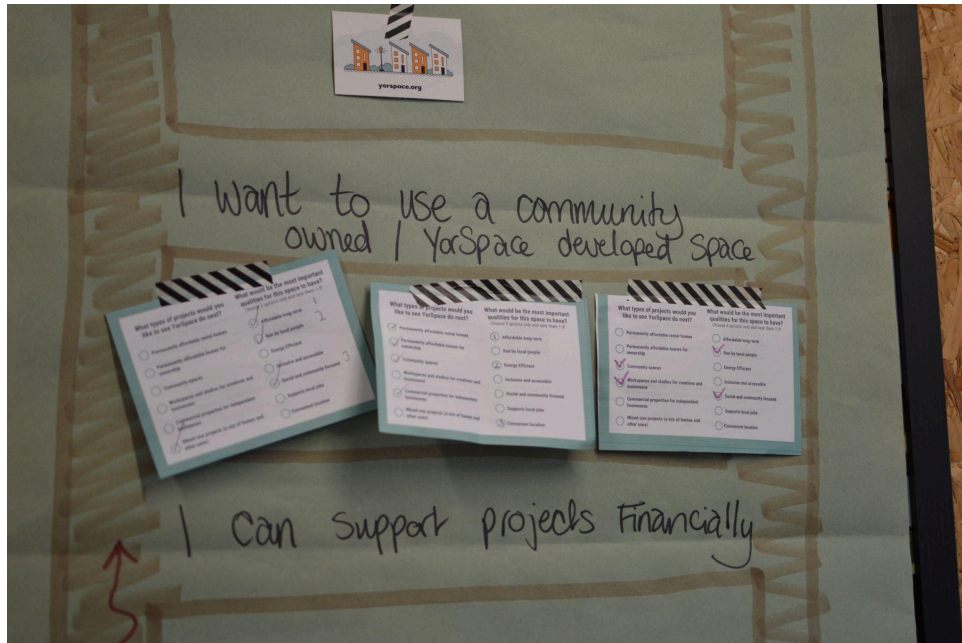
Community-led Sustainable Accessible
YorSpace:
**The Role of a Community Land
Trust in Driving Community Asset
Development**

YorSpace is on a mission to create community-led, lower cost, low carbon neighbourhoods.

Executive Summary

This report sets out what we learned from a 6-month project exploring how YorSpace, York's community land trust (a community benefit society), can catalyse and develop more cooperatively owned assets across the city. York faces stark affordability pressures: sky-high housing costs push key workers, hospitality staff, artists and social enterprises to the edges, while commercial rents make it hard for community groups to find stable space. Community ownership points to a different way – keeping land and buildings local, anchoring wealth where it's made, and prioritising long-term social good over quick private returns.

The project has deepened relationships across the city through potluck gatherings, a public-facing Community Engagement Day, and a Stakeholder Engagement Event. These activities collectively generated 21 project proposals, ranging from cultural venues and community hubs to vacant shop reuse models and new forms of housing, and surfaced structural and cultural barriers that need addressing. They also demonstrated how creative, low-threshold engagement can build confidence, spark imagination and allow people to see themselves as part of shaping York's future.



A Community Asset Development Toolkit has been produced – a practical, adaptable set of tools and insights designed to support communities and partners to identify, shape and deliver new community-owned projects. This includes:

- A redesigned Community Ownership Survey, created with York St John University's Institute for Social Justice, which provides a flexible way to listen to communities and understand their priorities, barriers and interests.
- A curated set of case studies showcasing community-owned pubs, markets, farms, laundrettes, housing developments and cultural venues across the UK, offering real-world models of governance, funding and stewardship.
- A suite of creative engagement activities, developed and tested through public events, which make participation accessible and enjoyable while generating rich insights into what matters to York's communities.

Alongside this toolkit, the project strengthened YorSpace's organisational capacity and clarified its evolving role in the city. A consistent insight from stakeholders is that YorSpace is currently performing three intertwined functions: holder, enabler and, at times, developer of community assets. Each function comes with its own demands, risks and expectations, and navigating them requires clearer pathways for partners and communities, stronger enabling infrastructure, and long-term financial mechanisms aligned to community values.

The work completed this year offers YorSpace a clearer sense of direction and a stronger foundation for growth. The project's findings affirm that community ownership has the potential to play a transformative role in York's future. That is, creating affordable homes, sustaining local enterprise, strengthening neighbourhood resilience and widening access to meaningful participation. But delivering this potential requires patient, values-aligned investment; supportive partnerships; a clear organisational model; and ongoing, open engagement with communities across the city.



The next phase of YorSpace's work will focus on turning insight into action: refining its organisational structure; progressing flagship opportunities such as Morrell House; growing a pipeline of community-led projects; expanding the Toolkit; and building the financial architecture needed for long-term community ownership. By continuing to develop these foundations, YorSpace is well placed to act as a catalyst for a stronger, fairer and more community-driven York – one in which land and assets are held, used and governed for the benefit of generations to come.

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Project Background

We set out to respond to a simple but pressing question:

How can a community land trust drive cooperatively owned community asset development in the city of York?

York is one of the least affordable cities in the UK, with high housing costs pushing key workers, hospitality staff, artists and social entrepreneurs to the margins, while rising commercial property prices make it difficult for social enterprises and community groups to secure stable, suitable space. Over the life of the project, we have seen how a growing gap between the cost of land and buildings and communities' ability to access affordable finance can stall or derail promising initiatives, particularly when conventional lenders apply high interest rates and exhibit limited appetite for risk.

This project has demonstrated that there is a local appetite for alternative ways of owning and developing community assets. Networks such as the York Social Enterprise Coalition, and the analysis set out in [JRF's "Fairer Future for York"](#) (Powell, 2024), show that grassroots organisations want different development and ownership models but lack a joined-up route to grant funding and patient, values-aligned capital. The work reported here has sought to begin bridging that gap by building on YorSpace's experience as a community benefit society and community land trust, and by working alongside local partners to shape viable co-operative business models backed by community share capital at affordable rates. In doing so, it has started to move beyond isolated schemes towards a more repeatable blueprint in which affordable, community-led, co-operatively owned assets – protected from speculative market pressures – can become a more familiar feature of York's neighbourhoods.

The project has drawn upon YorSpace's existing track record and has begun the process of strengthening it. Since 2014, YorSpace has helped deliver a community-owned housing development at Lowfield Green, raising £422,000 in community shares to acquire the land, alongside substantial grant funding and development finance. Indeed, an important strand of the project has involved learning from the compromises and challenges encountered along the way.

The Lowfield Green experience, while successful in many respects, required trade-offs that softened aspects of the original co-operative ownership ambition. Rather than treating these as isolated frustrations, the project has used them as a source of critical learning, working with partner organisations to develop new approaches that give community share capital greater depth and durability of impact. This learning has fed into preparatory work for a new community share prospectus planned for 2027, which will invite existing and new local investors to support a next generation of community-led projects.

Beyond individual schemes, the project has sparked wider thinking about community wealth building infrastructure in York. Building a broader portfolio of community-owned assets – and YorSpace's ability to borrow and recycle capital – would offer a foundation for a more resilient, co-operative local economy. However, this will require carefully nurturing existing relationships and forging new ones with communities and partner organisations, including in areas like Clifton and Westfield.

The project has bolstered YorSpace's capacity and citywide role. A core team led delivery, overseen by the board, blending operations, outreach and research support from York St John University's Institute for Social Justice. Through events, live case-study work with partners and honest reflection on successes and setbacks, it has yielded practical insights now shaping the Community Asset Development Toolkit.

Events

This section of the report summarises the programme of community-facing and stakeholder events delivered throughout the project. These gatherings formed the backbone of YorSpace's engagement work – opening up conversations about community ownership, creating welcoming spaces for people to share ideas, and generating a rich body of insight into York's needs, aspirations and barriers. From informal shared meals to hands-on public activities and targeted stakeholder workshops, the events were designed to be inclusive, imaginative and accessible, helping to build relationships and broaden who sees themselves as part of York's community-owned future.

'Sharing the Table' Potlucks

As part of its wider engagement work, YorSpace started hosting a series of "Sharing the Table" potluck evenings. Held in November, January and February at [Space CIC](#), with further events planned, these gatherings bring people together over shared food to talk about what community ownership could mean for York. The invitation is simple: bring a dish if you can, bring your ideas either way, and spend a couple of hours eating, listening and imagining how land and assets might be owned and governed differently.



The potlucks are designed to feel informal and welcoming rather than like a meeting. YorSpace uses them to create space for anyone who cares about the city's future – from local residents and community groups to businesses looking for premises and people interested in co-operative or community-led housing – to join the conversation. Each event interweaves food, stories from local voices and light-touch activities that encourage people to think about how to strengthen community ownership, protect spaces for local use and keep York affordable over the long term. Practical details, such as guidance on sharing allergens and reassurance that people are welcome even if they cannot bring food, are all part of making the space genuinely inclusive.

Running these events also gives YorSpace a chance to talk about its own journey and why it is investing in community-owned approaches. The potlucks often feature updates on projects such as Lowfield Green, reflections on the affordability crisis and prompts drawn from YorSpace's own publication, [The YorSpace Times](#). Furthermore, they provided the opportunity to pilot some of the activities that were later deployed as part of the community and stakeholder engagement events. Hosted in community-oriented venues, the potlucks are becoming a regular touchpoint in the calendar: a way to build relationships, deepen understanding of community ownership and invite more people to "share the table" in shaping the city's future.

Community Engagement Day

On 28 February 2026, YorSpace hosted a full-day public event at [SPARK York](#) to open up the ideas and practice of community ownership to residents, visitors and local groups in York. Set in a city known for its history and culture but increasingly shaped by high living costs and pressure on space, the day invited people to imagine different futures in which land, buildings and resources are held and governed for long-term community benefit rather than short-term gain. A total of 58 individuals attended throughout the day.

The event focused on listening as much as explaining. Activities and creative prompts were used to help people think about what kinds of spaces the city currently lacks, how empty or underused buildings might be repurposed, and what values should sit at the heart of any community-owned project. Rather than starting from fixed plans, the aim was to gather ideas, priorities and lived experiences from a wide range of participants so that future initiatives grow from local needs rather than top-down assumptions. People of all ages were encouraged to drop in, take part, reflect and play, contributing to a wider programme of research and partnership

work that seeks to understand – and respond to – the wants and aspirations of York's communities.

Activity Stations

The event was organised around five creative stations, each offering a different way to think about York, share priorities and suggest ideas for community-owned spaces. Activities were intentionally playful and accessible, based on the principle that engagement works best when it feels welcoming and values both personal experience and collective imagination. The stations combined mapping, setting values, naming problems, generating ideas and shaping more structured proposals.

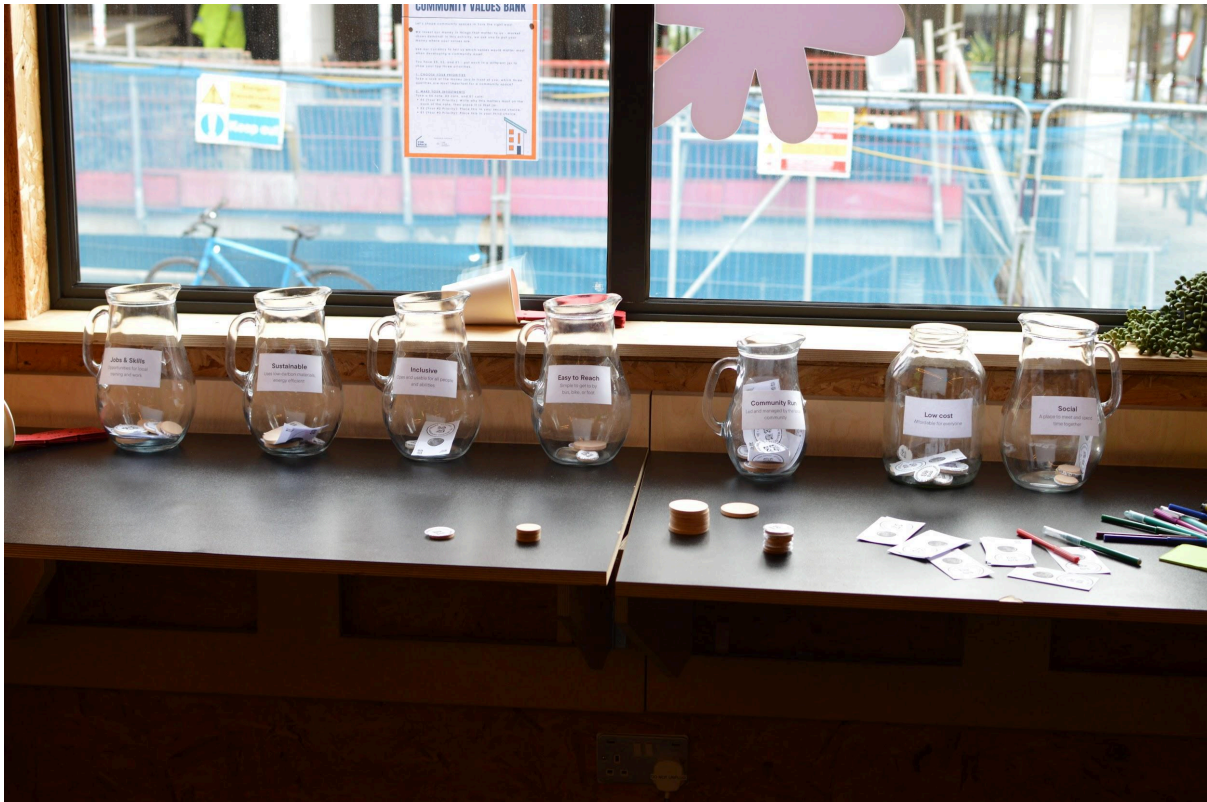
1. Where's Your York?

Participants marked key parts of their daily lives on a large map of York – where they live, work and socialise, and where they feel community spaces are missing. Notes about what they value or would improve revealed patterns of belonging, gaps and inequalities, grounding future thinking about community assets in the real geographies of people's lives.



2. Community Values Bank (City Mapping)

This “investment” game invited people to show what matters most in developing community assets. Using mock coins and notes, participants “spent” on jars representing different priorities and wrote why their top choice mattered. The exercise prompted reflection on trade-offs, surfaced shared values and created an immediate visual snapshot of collective priorities.



3. Barrier Smash Wall

Here, people named what makes community ownership difficult – from funding and bureaucracy to lack of time, confidence or information – writing each barrier on a paper “brick” to build a wall. The activity normalised open discussion of obstacles and identified recurring themes needing attention, visually reinforcing YorSpace’s role in helping to “smash” these barriers.



The themes that emerged cut across awareness, capacity, trust, money, land and bureaucracy. Many participants pointed to lack of time and capacity – shaped by work, caring and family commitments – as a major constraint, alongside the effort of sustaining momentum through the “messy middle” of projects. Others noted uncertainty and complexity: people often do not know how to get involved, what the process looks like, or what is expected of them.

Inclusivity and trust were also central. Some described feeling excluded or stigmatised, or suspecting “a catch”, while others highlighted weak communication and low confidence in institutional support. Structural barriers loomed large too: high land and property costs, limited funding, and slow or opaque planning procedures. Several participants also pointed to the difficulty of operating on the long timescales community asset projects require, when daily pressures are immediate.

4. Colour & Create YorHouse

A creative corner invited children, families and others to express ideas through drawing and decoration. Centred on a co-operative market stall theme, it asked what a community shop should sell, where products should come from and how surplus should be used. This light-touch, playful format encouraged participation from people less comfortable with written or technical exercises, capturing contributions that might otherwise stay unspoken.



5. A Game of Nomopoly

Nomopoly, a reworked version of Monopoly, helped participants think strategically about land, buildings and potential community assets. Moving around a board of local property types and prompts, they placed markers on preferred asset types, supported existing ideas or created new ones on blank cards. This combined fun with structured discussion, surfacing both immediate suggestions – such as empty buildings or specific needs – and broader, policy-level ideas.



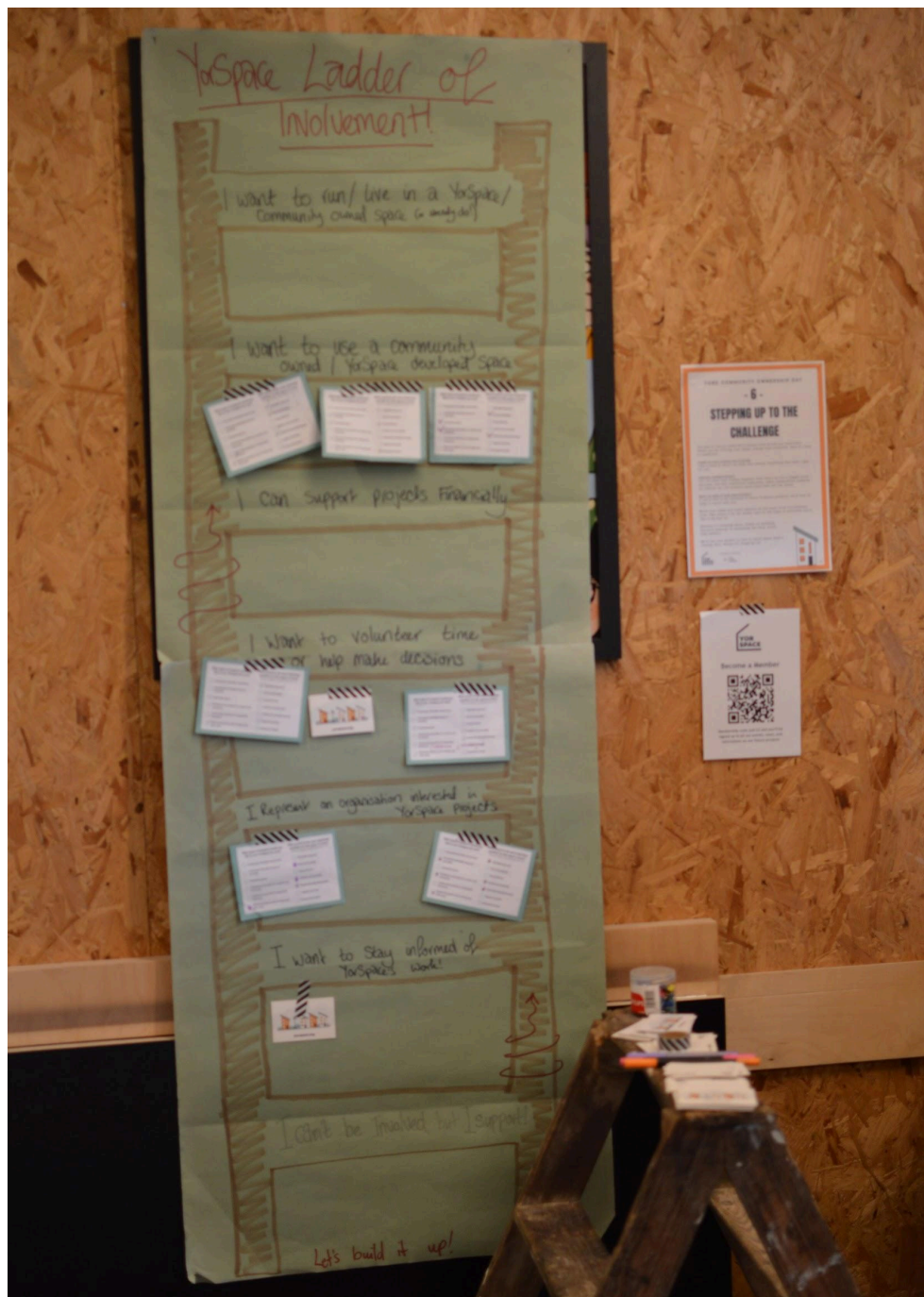
The game generated 21 proposals, spanning housing, community facilities, commercial spaces and mixed-use projects. Housing ideas included both rental and ownership models – from homes above shops to flood-resilient and multigenerational designs – while community facilities were the most numerous, covering venues, creative spaces, repair hubs and wellbeing centres. Participants also suggested reusing major sites, such as turning TK Maxx into a mixed-use arts centre or Bootham Hospital into a multi-purpose hub.

Notably, four proposals focused on policy reform rather than individual properties, calling for rent controls, tenancy support, action on empty shops and limits on

short-term lets. These drew strong support, suggesting that when people consider community ownership, many also look to change the wider property system itself.

6. Stepping Up To The Challenge

The final station invited participants to indicate how they might stay involved – sharing ideas, helping with practical work, joining decision-making or supporting communications. By offering multiple ways to take part, it recognised that meaningful community ownership depends on ongoing participation and that people bring different levels of time, confidence and skill.



Incentivisation

Participants collected tokens at each station, which could be exchanged for a small prize at the final stop, a simple way to reward curiosity and create momentum through the activities.

Stakeholder Engagement Event

On 12th March 2026, YorSpace hosted a half-day Stakeholder Engagement Event at SPARK York, bringing together community organisations, partners and interested residents to think about the future of community-owned land and assets in York. Framed by the question “How can a community land trust drive cooperatively owned community asset development in the city of York?” The session mixed short inputs with discussion and practical activities to draw out local priorities, opportunities and concerns. Selected parts of the event were recorded in audio, film and written form to feed into ongoing research and this report.



The programme set YorSpace's work in the context of a wider national movement for community ownership, outlining its existing model of acquiring land, supporting the development of homes and spaces, and partnering with co-operative organisations to manage them. Participants were invited to reflect on York's property landscape, the constraints of the current system and the potential for a

local “platform” that could support more community-run enterprises and buildings. The event formed part of a broader “York Community Ownership Day”, which also included survey work, case studies from around the UK, and interactive mapping and design exercises.

Programme & Activities

The event began with a welcome and introduction, followed by two themed sessions – Landing in York and Building & Development – which set YorSpace’s history, values and operating model in context. These opening inputs revisited why YorSpace was created, traced the journey to Lowfield Green Housing Co-operative, and explained how the community land trust model can build community wealth by expanding community-owned land, drawing on ethical local supply chains and delivering not-for-profit housing.

Participants then moved into a series of interactive activities designed to surface personal, organisational and city-wide perspectives on community asset ownership. These included:

- Resonance & Connection – individual and paired reflection on how YorSpace’s work relates to attendees’ roles, interests and organisational missions.
- Pitch or Ditch – a fast-paced review of 21 community-asset proposals gathered through the “Nomopoly” engagement activity at the Community Engagement Day, encouraging participants to test, compare and champion ideas.
- Proposal Development – group work to draw out the value of selected proposals, identify next steps and begin shaping them into shareable concepts.
- Barrier Identification and Overcoming Challenges – collective analysis of a “wall of barriers” gathered from previous events, focusing on what kinds of support would be needed to move proposals forwards.
- Reflective Role-Based Exercise – inviting participants to step back into their stakeholder roles and identify concrete ways they or their organisations could support community asset development.
- Pitching Session – short group pitches of developed ideas to the whole room, followed by discussion about the support different stakeholders could offer.

The event closed with a plenary discussion about what should come next for YorSpace: the kinds of tools, research, resources and structures that could help partners engage more confidently and effectively with community asset ownership. Participants were encouraged to carry the work beyond the day itself, for example by becoming YorSpace members, advocating for the model in their own networks, sharing the community ownership survey and taking part in upcoming events and film screenings.

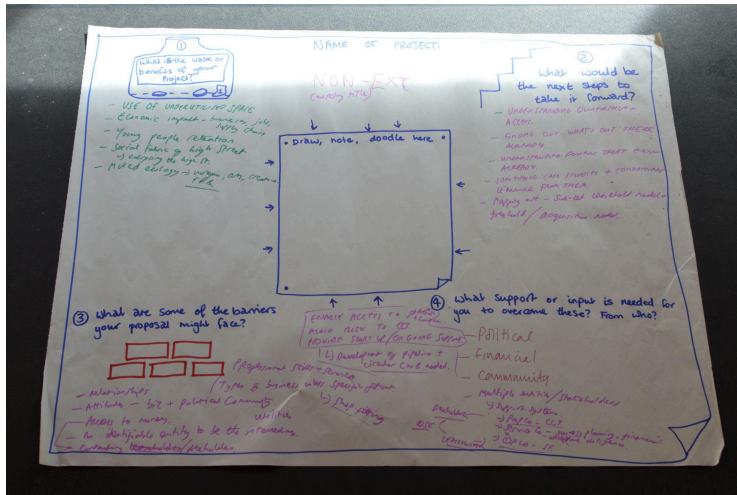
Proposal Development & Discussion

Three proposals that made it through to the final stage of the process were:

1. Non-X (Vacant Property / Community Reuse Model)
2. Madcap Motel (Music Venue + Affordable Accommodation for Musicians)
3. Morrell House Housing Co-op (Co-housing with community facilities)



Proposal 1: "Non-Ex"



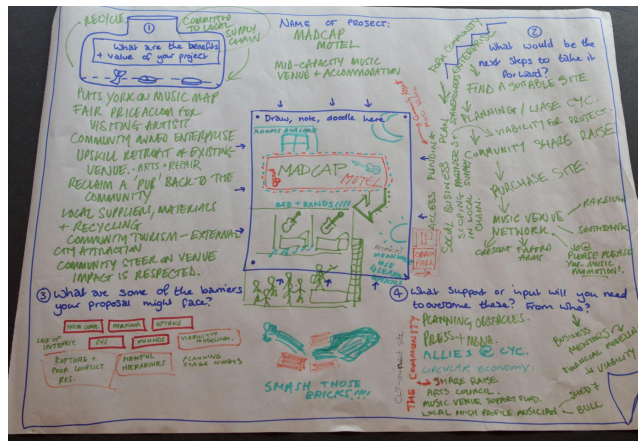
"Bringing empty shops back into community use"

This proposal explored how York could make better use of long-empty commercial units by turning them into affordable, community-focused spaces. The potential to leverage new legal powers means that properties left vacant for over a year can now be brought into use by the council, creating an opening for organisations like YorSpace to step in as long-term stewards. In practice, a community land trust could take on the freehold or a long lease, then curate a mix of social enterprises, local makers and small businesses that bring life back to struggling high streets.

Participants saw strong potential for this model to create jobs, shorten supply chains and increase the vibrancy and diversity of local centres, drawing on examples from places like Redcar and Newton Aycliffe where similar issues with absentee ownership have hollowed out town centres. They also recognised significant challenges, including the complexity of dealing with multiple owners, navigating freehold and leasehold arrangements, and finding capital for fit-outs so new tenants can open their doors. The group agreed that a robust intermediary organisation would be essential to manage risk, hold assets, and support a pipeline of social-enterprise tenants.

Stakeholders around the table felt they could contribute case-study experience from existing projects, networks of potential tenants, and energy for sharing learning across the city. However, they stressed that this idea will only work with careful due diligence, professional legal and property advice, and a clear plan for how revenues will circulate back into the local economy rather than being extracted.

Proposal 2: "Madcap Motel"



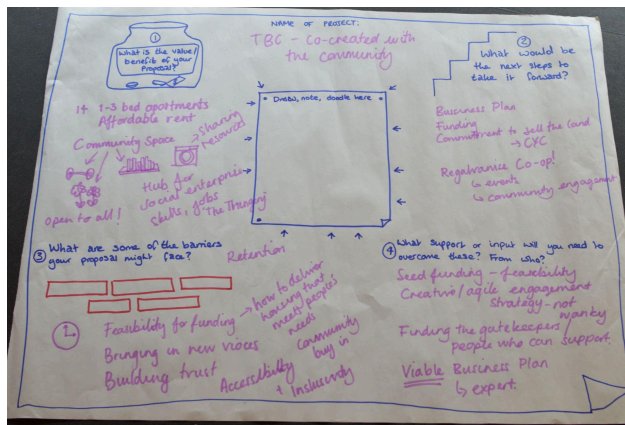
"A community-owned music venue with rooms for artists"

Madcap Motel imagines a mid-size, community-owned music venue in York that also provides affordable accommodation for touring artists. The starting point is a clear problem: bands and performers often skip York because it is too expensive to stay overnight, making it hard for the city to sit firmly on national touring circuits. By combining a venue with simple, on-site rooms, the project aims to reduce these costs, strengthen the live music scene, and create a more sustainable cultural offer for residents and visitors.

The proposal is rooted in a social-enterprise business model, with ticket and accommodation income feeding back into community benefit rather than private profit, potentially through a [FairBNB-style](#) mechanism that supports affordable housing. The group envisaged working with existing venues and networks (such as the [Crescent](#), [Fulford Arms](#) and others) rather than competing with them, building alliances around programming, marketing and advocacy. A community share offer and, ideally, community freehold ownership were seen as ways to embed local control and resilience.

Participants were realistic about potential barriers. They highlighted likely concerns about noise and late-night activity, the risk of local opposition, and the planning complexities of mixing a venue with bedrooms above. There were also questions about how to navigate brewery-owned properties and licensing arrangements if the project tried to repurpose an existing pub or venue. Stakeholders felt YorSpace could help by using its relationships with the council, supporting a share raise, and bringing in design and engagement expertise, but emphasised the need to prove both the financial viability and the wider community value of the model.

Proposal 3: Morrell House



“A housing co-op and neighbourhood hub”

Morrell House, the proposal that received the most votes, focuses on converting a former care home into a housing co-operative with shared community facilities. The vision is for around 13 affordable rented homes of different sizes, held in trust for the community and run day-to-day by a resident-led co-op. Alongside the homes, the building and its grounds would host a range of shared spaces such as a community room, laundrette, “library of things”, skills-sharing and enterprise spaces, gardens and food-growing areas, all designed to foster intergenerational, neighbourly living.

Participants felt this was a tangible and timely opportunity: the building already exists, and there is a clear social need for secure, genuinely affordable housing coupled with places to meet, learn and organise locally. The group emphasised doing this with local residents rather than for them, through co-design of the name, identity and layout, and creative methods of engagement that would appeal to people not normally involved in formal consultations. Storytelling, events and visible activity were seen as key tools for building a sense of ownership and pride in the project from the outset.

However, several practical and institutional hurdles were identified. These include navigating Homes England funding rules that may not easily align with co-operative governance, ensuring that people nominated through housing bands feel genuinely involved, and re-energising a co-op idea that had previously existed but faded. The project will also require seed funding for feasibility and business planning, significant staff time for listening and outreach, and a clear asset-transfer commitment from the council based on a strong business case. Stakeholders around the table offered support with communications, engagement and advocacy, framing Morrell House as a flagship example of what community-led housing in York could look like.

General Discussion: YorSpace's Role and Next Steps

After the proposals, the conversation broadened to focus on YorSpace's identity, long-term strategy and how it works with communities. Participants felt that YorSpace needs to clearly explain its twin role: on one hand, as a community land trust that can hold land and buildings in perpetuity; on the other, as an enabling service that helps groups form co-ops, shape projects and navigate complex development journeys. This clarity is important because there is still confusion about whether YorSpace helps people buy individual homes or supports a wider mix of rental, shared ownership and co-operative models.

Stakeholders encouraged YorSpace to think boldly about its long-term asset base, suggesting that owning or stewarding multiple properties across the city would give it the stability and credibility needed to influence how land and buildings are used. They stressed that YorSpace's success depends on a pipeline of community groups coming forward with ideas and capacity to steward projects over time. Visible, low-threshold activities – from pop-up spaces to collaborations with festivals and design events – were suggested as ways to reach people who are currently “not in the room” and to make YorSpace feel present in everyday city life.

Several contributors called for a clearer, more accessible roadmap for how a community idea becomes a YorSpace project. This could include a simple step-by-step guide, a “readiness scale” so groups can see where they are and what is needed next, or even a playful digital tool to help people self-assess feasibility. Underpinning these suggestions was a concern about burnout and continuity: without clear processes, new leaders and supportive infrastructure, good ideas risk stalling as volunteers' time and energy are stretched. Overall, the discussion framed YorSpace as an organisation that can challenge conventional notions of ownership while also offering practical routes for communities to shape the places where they live.

Community Asset Development Toolkit

The Community Asset Development Toolkit is a practical, growing resource to support YorSpace as it takes on more land and buildings for long-term community benefit across York. With work now stretching beyond Lowfield Green, the need for clear tools has sharpened – ones that can steer future projects, draw people in more deeply, and help partners see how community ownership meets real local needs.

The Toolkit creates a joined-up way to identify, shape and sustain community-owned assets in the city. Above all, it starts with listening: capturing what matters to people, what holds them back, and how they want to get involved, so projects grow from lived experience rather than preconceived plans. It also brings lessons from other UK communities – their models of governance, funding and stewardship – ready for YorSpace and its partners to adapt as York's own community ownership scene takes shape.

Community Ownership Survey

As YorSpace's work evolved beyond the specific context of Lowfield Green, it became clear that earlier surveys were too closely tied to individual projects or investment opportunities. Previous questionnaires mainly acted as sign-up forms: one for those interested in joining the Lowfield Green Housing Co-operative, another linked to its community share offer. While effective in building commitment around a single development, these tools offered little flexibility for understanding broader patterns of interest or for reaching people curious but not yet ready to commit.

Recognising this gap, the project identified the need for a more open, low-burden survey that could accompany events and outreach as an ongoing means of listening to residents, allies and partners. To meet this need, YorSpace worked with researchers from [York St John University's Institute for Social Justice](#) to co-design a new Community Ownership Survey.

The aim was to create a short (five to ten minute) questionnaire that was still rich enough to explore three linked questions: what kinds of spaces York most needs; how community ownership could help fill those gaps; and how people might wish to be involved. The survey begins with a short overview of YorSpace's mission, framing the questions around the aim of transforming unused and underused buildings into community assets. Drawing on the Lowfield Green experience while signalling a wider city focus, this introduction encourages participants to see their responses as contributions to emerging projects rather than sign-ups for an existing one.

[To visit our Community Wealth Building Survey please follow this link.](#)

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is organised around three themes: connection to place, views on spaces and places, and potential involvement with YorSpace.

The first section asks about respondents' relationship with York – whether they live, work, study, have family ties, or plan to move – and which area they feel most connected to. This creates a geographically sensitive picture of interest in community ownership, capturing insight from both residents and those with strong relational ties to the city. Follow-up questions on how often people use shared spaces and how familiar they are with YorSpace provide a baseline measure of awareness and engagement.

The second section explores what kinds of spaces people think York most needs. Respondents rank different types of provision – affordable housing, community venues, workspaces and studios, and mixed-use developments – from most to least important. Open questions then invite them to describe missing or inaccessible spaces or to suggest specific buildings that could benefit from community ownership. These data combine broad indicators of priority with qualitative insight to guide project mapping and site identification. Respondents also select which qualities they consider most important in a community space – for example affordability, inclusivity, sustainability, social value and accessibility – helping to define shared standards of “what good looks like”.

Another question focuses on barriers to community ownership. Respondents identify their top three perceived challenges from a list including high property costs, limited funding, community capacity, planning constraints, collaboration difficulties, lack of information and feelings of exclusion. Cross-referencing these findings with other project strands – such as stakeholder workshops and the community wealth-building toolkit – enables YorSpace to test how organisational assumptions match residents' lived experience.

The final section gauges appetite for involvement. Respondents choose up to two preferred ways of engaging, from project leadership or committee roles to membership, volunteering, financial support, network sharing or simply receiving updates. An optional email field and an open “anything else” question allow for

further comment or contact. These help turn a simple sign-up form into a targeted tool for understanding and developing community engagement.

Value & Impact

The development of this survey has added value to the project in several ways. First, it has given YorSpace a reusable, adaptable instrument that can be deployed at events, online and through partner networks to build a cumulative picture of interest in community ownership across York, rather than only around individual schemes. Second, by combining place-based questions, attitudinal items and involvement preferences, it offers a more rounded understanding of who is currently engaging, where gaps in reach remain, and what kinds of support or opportunities different groups might be looking for. Third, the survey is both accessible to a general audience and robust enough to inform ongoing research and evaluation, including the action-research work on community wealth building described elsewhere in the report. In short, the new survey has become an important bridge between YorSpace's practical project work and its wider ambition to listen to, learn from and organise with a broader cross-section of York's communities.

Case Studies

We curated a set of community wealth building projects from across the UK, each offering a different route into community-led ownership and control. The examples range from pubs and markets to housing, launderettes, farms and cultural venues, showing how communities have experimented with a variety of organisational and financial models to shape local spaces on their own terms. Rather than presenting idealised stories, the case studies pay attention to the practicalities, compromises and learning involved in community-led development. Developed by Postgraduate Research Assistant Megan Orgill, they offer a grounded resource for organisations such as YorSpace that are considering how to deepen their role in stewarding land and assets for long-term community benefit.

Cases Included

- The Bevy Pub, Brighton
- Granby Four Streets, Liverpool
- Fordhall Organic Farm, Shropshire
- Radcliffe Market Hall, Manchester
- Kitty's Launderette, Liverpool
- LILAC, Leeds
- Nudge Community Builders, Plymouth
- Hampstead Norreys Community Shop, Berkshire
- Homebaked, Liverpool
- Stretford Public Hall, Manchester
- Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative
- Hastings Commons, Sussex



Value & Impact

These case studies provide a clear, grounded picture of community ownership in action across the UK. Varied in scale, purpose and place, they all centre on local people taking responsibility for the spaces, services and resources that shape daily life. The case studies reveal the strength and adaptability of community-owned assets and offer YorSpace a practical reference point as it refines its role in York's community wealth-building efforts.

A key insight is how community ownership can secure everyday essentials. Locally owned shops, pubs, launderettes, farms and cultural venues are far less likely to close or be sold to distant investors if they are under community ownership. Examples such as Hampstead Norreys Community Shop and Homebaked illustrate this well: routine purchases like bread or groceries circulate value locally when managed cooperatively, creating steady social and economic benefit.

Once in community hands, these assets often evolve beyond their original purpose. They become hubs for connection and mutual support – from the Bevy Pub's dementia cafés and outdoor spaces to Kitty's Launderette workshops. In places affected by disinvestment or isolation, even modest buildings can anchor wellbeing and participation, showing that community ownership is as much about people as premises. Strong governance also stands out as a key feature. Whether as community benefit societies, land trusts, worker co-ops or mutual models, these initiatives share democratic control at their core. This involvement draws residents into decision-making, builds practical skills in finance and management, and generates local leadership that makes future projects more viable. Some, like Nudge Community Builders and Hastings Commons, have gone further by turning derelict or vacant sites into lively hubs for work, culture and enterprise. Their approach shows how resident-led change can transform places without reliance on external developers.

For YorSpace, these examples directly inform the Community Asset Development Toolkit. They illustrate viable asset types, blended funding and organisational structures while emphasising long-term stewardship – ensuring land and buildings remain affordable, accessible and accountable. This expands the role of a land trust from holding property to nurturing enterprise, protecting social space and strengthening community wellbeing. Ultimately, these precedents help YorSpace define its place in York's evolving ecosystem, identify collaboration opportunities and foster shared leadership. Above all, they affirm that when communities own and

shape their surroundings, the outcomes extend far beyond bricks and mortar: pride grows, belonging deepens and local wealth endures.

Engagement Activities

A series of repeatable activities for public and professional audiences were developed as part of the project. These are outlined in the engagement events sub-sections above.

Value & Impact

The engagement activities were anchored in four core principles: inclusivity, imagination, transparency and shared ownership. Each exercise – whether mapping, gaming, reflection or creative play – was designed to lower barriers to participation and recognise the expertise people hold in their own lives and neighbourhoods. Rather than seeking opinions, the approach treated engagement as joint exploration, allowing participants to contribute in their own words and at their own pace. It rested on a simple belief: community ownership begins with relationships and trust, not buildings or legal forms.

Accessibility ran through every aspect of the programme. Potluck dinners felt like social gatherings rather than meetings, using food and shared stories to build ease and connection. The full-day Community Engagement Event extended this through activities suited to all ages and levels of experience – from a creative corner for children and families to a “Barrier Smash Wall” for naming practical or emotional obstacles. By meeting people where they were, these events drew in a far wider range of voices than formal consultations typically achieve.

The activities also redistributed knowledge and decision-making. Mapping exercises and the “Where’s Your York?” investment game revealed patterns of belonging, inequality and potential, rooting discussion in lived experience rather than abstract plans. “Nomopoly” translated civic complexity – planning, enterprise and policy – into play, generating practical suggestions alongside long-term ambitions. This blend of structure and openness produced ideas that were both imaginative and achievable.

Across public and stakeholder sessions, the focus remained on building collective capacity. Participants moved from idea generation to early problem-solving: identifying obstacles, outlining next steps and exploring partnerships. Community members and professionals left with a more grounded understanding of both the

challenges (funding, bureaucracy, sustaining energy) and the assets already present (networks, skills and creativity). The process shifted the conversation from what might be possible in theory to what could be realised concretely with the right scaffolding from YorSpace.

In the short term, these events produced 21 project proposals, a consolidated map of barriers and fresh connections between groups and individuals. They deepened YorSpace's understanding of the conditions people face – time pressures, information gaps and systemic frustrations – and laid the groundwork for a more participatory model of community ownership in York, built on confidence, agency and mutual support.

Ultimately, these activities show that engagement itself is community wealth building in action. By giving people time, tools and trust to imagine, challenge and co-design, YorSpace is already nurturing the social foundations that sustainable community ownership depends on. The approach has surfaced ideas that are ambitious yet grounded, and it signals the path ahead: create clearer routes into involvement, address recurring barriers and keep growing a city-wide ecosystem of community-stewarded land and space.



Conclusion & What Next

This project set out to explore how a community land trust can drive cooperatively owned asset development in York. In doing so, it has clarified both the promise and the practical demands of that vision. Across engagement activities, surveys, case studies and stakeholder conversations, a consistent picture emerged: there is strong appetite for ownership models that keep land and buildings in local hands, but the path from interest to delivery depends on a better-connected ecosystem of support.

YorSpace is already combining several roles – holder, enabler and developer – each with distinct expectations, risks and responsibilities. As a land trust, it safeguards assets in perpetuity, protecting them from speculative markets. As an enabler, it helps community groups build governance, confidence and viable plans. As a developer, it delivers schemes that meet financial, regulatory and community criteria. Through this project, these roles have become more clearly defined: YorSpace operates simultaneously at micro (residents), meso (co-ops, neighbourhoods, partners) and macro (city systems, policy, finance) levels, often mediating between competing priorities and timescales.

These dynamics raise important questions about scope and capacity. Where should YorSpace's involvement end and new resident-led groups take over? How can it enable fresh projects without overstretching or diverting from its mission? Stakeholders were clear that clearer routes are needed – both for communities taking first steps and for partners seeking to collaborate. The work also highlighted potential models, such as Mutual Home Ownership, that could bridge tensions between CLT-level stewardship and resident-level affordability.

What the project has delivered is substantial. YorSpace now holds stronger evidence on community priorities, a suite of adaptable engagement tools, a clearer understanding of participation barriers, and the Community Asset Development Toolkit as a practical framework. Its role in York is more visible and credible, confirming it as a key actor in community-led and socially driven development. Most importantly, the project has laid foundations for a more coherent approach to community wealth building – one that blends imagination with implementation, supports early-stage initiatives, and opens pathways for patient, values-aligned investment.

What Next?

Looking ahead, there are several priorities that will shape YorSpace's trajectory in the coming years:

1. Strengthening YorSpace's organisational structure

The project has highlighted the need to clarify and formalise YorSpace's dual identity as both a land-holding CLT and an enabling organisation. This may involve developing a more explicit governance model, clearer processes for how groups progress from idea to project, and internal structures that create a "firebreak" between asset stewardship and enabling functions, ensuring each can operate effectively.

2. Progressing Morrell House as a flagship opportunity

Morrell House emerged as a widely supported and achievable project, offering York a practical demonstration of community-led housing combined with shared community facilities. The next steps include securing feasibility funding, strengthening relationships with potential residents, and working collaboratively with the council on asset transfer. Morrell House will serve as an important test case for YorSpace's evolving role and a model for future schemes.

3. Developing the pipeline of future projects

Beyond Morrell House, the project generated multiple proposals, from vacant shop reuse to cultural venues and workspace concepts, with varying degrees of readiness. YorSpace now needs to explore which of these can be taken forward, what partnerships are required, and how to ensure that new projects reflect both local need and organisational capacity. Several "irons in the fire" may progress in parallel, creating a more diverse and resilient asset base over time.

4. Expanding the Community Asset Development Toolkit

The Toolkit will continue to evolve as new learning emerges. Future additions could include a step-by-step project readiness guide, tools for community self-assessment, and clearer communication materials that explain the CLT model and different pathways into involvement. This will help build confidence among community groups, reduce uncertainty, and support a more consistent flow of new ideas.

5. Building the financial architecture for long-term growth

A central challenge is developing funding mechanisms that match the long timescales and values of community ownership. Preparatory work for a new community share prospectus will be important, as will exploring blended finance, partnerships with values-aligned investors, and opportunities to recycle capital through a growing portfolio of assets. These steps are essential to underpin a sustainable community wealth-building strategy for the city.

6. Deepening city-wide relationships and visibility

The project emphasised the importance of YorSpace being present in everyday city life – through pop-ups, collaborations with festivals, creative engagement and ongoing community conversations. Extending this work will help reach people currently “not in the room”, widen participation and ensure that community ownership becomes both more visible and more normalised across York.

These next steps point towards a more confident, capable and catalytic YorSpace: an organisation equipped not only to hold land in trust for future generations but also to inspire, support and unlock the creativity of York’s communities. By continuing to build the social, organisational and financial foundations laid through this project, YorSpace can help make community-owned land and assets a defining feature of a fairer, more resilient and more imaginative city.

References

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