

## AT A GLANCE

**ASSETS AND SOCIAL ECONOMY SUSTAINABILITY**  
*(18<sup>th</sup> June 2025, (in-person, Witton Lakes Eco Hub, Erdington))*

Please see below the session summary of notes from the June 2025 Social Economy FORUM meeting focused on ‘ASSETS AND SOCIAL ECONOMY SUSTAINABILITY. Acquiring a Building as a Social Economy Organisation in the West Midlands.’

**OUR HOSTS** | This session opportunity was kindly hosted by [Witton Lodge](#) at their Witton Lakes Eco Hub, Erdington, B23 7XX.

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### BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Asset development and specifically building purchase is a very relevant topic in the current economic climate. BSSEC’s June Social Economy Forum held at Witton Lakes Eco Centre in Erdington, Birmingham, was well attended and the conversation lively. Social economy organisations in the West Midlands are increasingly exploring property ownership to secure their futures, reduce costs, and create community assets that contribute to inclusive local economies. The discussions at the Forum covered rationale, funding options, policy landscape, practical experience and case studies related to acquiring a building. We hope this report will support organisations in making informed, strategic decisions about property acquisition. We also make recommendations to key stakeholders in the West Midlands within the social economy for additional support required to support organisations on this journey.

Making a building acquisition would support long-term sustainability, create opportunities for income generation, and strengthen an organisation’s role in the regional social economy ecosystem. While there are financial, operational, and legal considerations, owning a building can offer significant social and economic returns, particularly in areas undergoing regeneration or where community ownership is a priority. It can also unlock new opportunities for partnership and service delivery.

### WEST MIDLANDS POLICY CONTEXT

#### Inclusive Growth and Community Wealth Building

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has committed to an inclusive growth agenda that supports community-led regeneration, anchor collaboration, and local asset ownership. Key frameworks include:

- The WMCA Social Economy Growth Strategy (2021–2030)
- Community Wealth Building Charter
- Levelling Up and Town Deals
- Brownfield Regeneration Fund

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### Anchor Institutions and Asset Transfers

The Local councils (e.g. Birmingham, Dudley, Coventry) have asset transfer policies that allow community organisations to take ownership of unused public buildings, especially where a strong community impact can be demonstrated.

Organisations at the Forum spoke about the difficulty in acquiring buildings through Asset transfer, as Councils are legally obliged to seek the best price for the building they are disposing of, and this can conflict with Asset transfer. There are, however some good examples of organisations across the region who have acquired buildings and produce detailed social value reports linked to financial values to evidence social value instead of paying rent. These are usually on long-term leases.

### Operating context

The West Midlands has a dynamic and growing social economy with a strong network of voluntary, community and social enterprise [VCSE] organisations contributing to inclusive growth, job creation and public service innovation. However, many of these organisations face challenges related to insecure premises, rising rental costs, and a lack of control over their physical environment.

## FUNDING SOURCES

### National and UK-Wide Funds

Resourcing a building purchase is a key barrier, but there are many agencies available to the sector that could support an acquisition. They will all have their own criteria and application processes. Key national-level funds include:

Fund	Description	Max Grant
Community Ownership Fund (DLUHC)	For community groups acquiring or saving buildings	Up to £2m
Power to Change – Community Business Fund	Capital and revenue for community-led businesses	Up to £300k
National Lottery Community Fund	Various grants; Reaching Communities may fund capital	Up to £500k+
Architectural Heritage Fund	Project development and viability grants for historic buildings	£10k–£100k
Social Investment Business (SIB) – Reach Fund	Development funding to prepare for social investment	Up to £15k
Community Shares Booster Fund	Match equity funding for community share offers	Up to £100k match

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### West Midlands & Local Sources

Local and regional sources include:

- WMCA Investment Programmes: Regeneration, brownfield, social economy
- Local Authority Community Asset Transfer Schemes
- Community Share schemes, e.g. Co-operatives UK
- Private investment and local High Street banks
- West Midlands Community Foundation Network

### Social Investment Providers

- Big Society Capital (via Resonance, Big Issue Invest)
- Key Fund
- CAF Venturesome
- Triodos Bank / Charity Bank
- Local Credit Unions

## THE PRACTICAL STUFF

### Why buy or acquire a building?

- Securing long-term operational stability.
- Generating unrestricted income.
- Saving money on rent and service charges.
- Contributing to place-based regeneration.
- Supports the achievement of the organisation's social/economic/environmental mission

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### Property search criteria

- Size – is it suitable for your needs rather than a building being offloaded by a public sector organisation?
- Location – access, place, transport services
- Saving money on rent and service charges.
- Condition – will there be ongoing maintenance costs? Age of property
- Affordability
- Tenure: freehold, lease, etc
- Look everywhere for a suitable building, including estate agents

### Risks

- Financial overreach or cost overruns
- Planning or zoning restrictions
- Underused space leading to revenue gaps.
- Increased administrative and maintenance responsibilities
- Change in organizational priorities or leadership capacity
- Insurance, health and safety, building compliance and legislation associated with running a building

### CASE STUDIES

#### Stirchley Co-operative Development, Birmingham

Model: Community Benefit Society with multi-stakeholder governance

Project: Purpose-built mixed-use development for social enterprises, including a bakery, bookstore, and housing

Finance: Community shares, grant funding, and social investment

Impact: Long-term affordable premises for anchor social economy organisations in South Birmingham

#### ISE CIC, Birmingham

Model: Community Interest Company, Limited by Guarantee

Project 1: to transform a vacant shop [previously unsold] into a Social Enterprise Development Hub [Digbeth]

Finance: Company reserves, grant funding, and High street bank loan for building purchase and refurbishment

Impact: Long-term affordable premises for the start-up and growth of social economy organisations in Digbeth. Affordable premises of partner organisations.

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Project 2: To obtain asset transfer from Birmingham City Council for the Women's Enterprise Hub, Sparkbrook

Finance: Company reserves, EU grant funding [ legal costs, expert advice and building refurbishment]

Impact: Long-term affordable premises for women in Sparkbrook and surrounding areas for rental, training and support services for female entrepreneurs. Community facilities, training, and events.

## SECTOR NEEDS INFORMATION FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

### Support Needs Identified

- Produce a list of organisations and advisers who can support a building acquisition, eg, business support/business planning, property experts, specialist architects, etc. There could also be peer support opportunities for those who would mentor others.
- A list of organisations that have underused space for rent to be published regularly by BSSEC for those seeking new rental premises.
- Update the list of potential funders for building acquisition, refurbishment, and associated costs.
- Bring together any toolkits and online resources
- Bite-sized training courses to support different elements of the process.
- Run more awareness sessions on the benefits of building acquisition and consider partnership models.
- Document the learning for the future.
- Set a target to support 10 organisations across the region to acquire buildings as an exemplar for others.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Important to support!

Purchasing a building is a significant but potentially transformative step for a social economy organisation in the West Midlands. With careful planning and stakeholder engagement, it can provide a foundation for sustainable impact, economic empowerment, and stronger place-based outcomes. It will also contribute to the broader economic development of the West Midlands and the social economy target for the region of doubling the size of the sector.



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Our thanks to all who attended this **ASSETS AND SOCIAL ECONOMY SUSTAINABILITY** session, our speakers and for the engaging contribution to this topic.

