



## Economic Recovery Fund Evaluation 2022

A Kada Research Report for Sheffield City Council

October 2022

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kada Research were commissioned by Sheffield City Council (SCC) to evaluate their Economic Recovery Fund (ERF). A £2m fund to support high street recovery in district centres. The executive summary provides an overview of the ERF and its wider context, key findings, and recommendations.

### AIMS AND APPROACH

Kada Research were commissioned by Sheffield City Council (SCC) to evaluate their £2m Economic Recovery Fund (ERF). The evaluation investigated: the fund's achievements in terms of key outputs/impacts; what worked well and what elements should be taken forward into a future iteration of the fund; areas that did not work as well and how they could be rectified; and how the ERF approach could inform future district centre work.

The study approach was co-designed with ERF Delivery Management Team and included:

- An **inception stage** where the delivery team and Kada Research worked together to develop a project implementation workplan, research tools, and shared understanding.
- A **desk review** to assess the wider strategic context, collate intelligence/data, project progress, and comparator projects.
- **24 Stakeholder discussions** with members of the steering group, Sheffield City Council, Business Information Officers, project leads and beneficiaries.
- **Primary research** including visits to five beneficiary districts to consult with Business Information Officers and local businesses.
- **Impact assessment** evaluating the quantitative and qualitative information with a focus upon social and economic impact, return on investment and wider benefits.
- **Reporting and presentation** of the key findings and recommendations. A presentation was created for the Economic Development and Skills Policy Committee with the full findings contained within this report.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY FUND

Launched in March 2021, the ERF saw Sheffield City Council provide £2 million to support high street recovery in district centres. Applications were welcomed from collaborations with innovative plans to increase demand and footfall to re-energise their local high street. A large emphasis was placed upon local autonomy and local decision making. Eight successful applicants received up to £50,000 in funds and seven successful applicants received up to £200,000 in funds. The Fund also gave grants to eleven projects that formed part of the 2021 Summer in the Outdoor City campaign. These projects are the subject to a separate evaluation, having taken place earlier and having been focused on city centre events, the two parts of the project were seen to be distinct.

The ERF has four key objectives:

- Supporting local economic recovery; helping Sheffield's businesses and retail/hospitality centres to rebuild and grow.
- Helping businesses to reopen safely and remain viable – building resilience to future economic changes.
- Protecting jobs and businesses, particularly in the hardest hit sectors.

- 
- Generating demand, bringing back customers and promoting consumer confidence – encouraging people to shop locally and buy from independent stores.

## CONTEXT

Covid-19 and lockdown regulations had a significant impact on the UK economy and the retail sector, for example suburban centres lost up to nine weeks of sales between March 2020 and September 2021.

Sheffield's district centres have gone through a significant period of flux with significant attention and support required to maintain their ongoing viability and vibrancy.

The UK Government and Sheffield City Council have supported Covid retail recovery with policies and strategies including the furlough scheme, business rate relief and the Business Recovery Plan.

The ERF is taking an innovative and unique approach to district high street recovery.

## KEY FINDINGS

Stakeholder and beneficiary consultation within district centres, combined with social value impact analysis provides a detailed evidence base. It has:

- Created a strong social value impact with a net social return of between £1.99 and £2.24 per £1 spent
- 56 outputs have been delivered across the city to date
- Supported communities across Sheffield and built new partnerships
- Led to the establishment of eight new business forums
- Received positive feedback from businesses and communities
- Visibly improved district centres
- Empowered community and business groups
- Achieved successful budget control
- Overwhelmingly supported by stakeholders
- Received positive media coverage which has promoted the '*game changing*' fund and districts.

This evidence supports a positive story on the impacts of Round 1 of ERF in district centres across Sheffield which was delivered without a blueprint to work from and in many cases without existing business networks. It is an impressive achievement that within this context, all fifteen projects are on track to deliver their outputs. The ERF has proved the viability and benefits of this new collaborative and creative community led approach and demonstrated what can be achieved at a local level.

There are also lessons to learn from to improve the journey, and ultimate success, of the next Round of the ERF.

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## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Notable success has been made in meeting the original strategic objectives with all fifteen projects are on track to deliver clear outputs. Across Sheffield the ERF has supported 56 outputs including community events, shopfront improvement schemes, parklets and benches. Moreover, the ERF has facilitated consensus and collaborative place-based working within district and even creating many community partnerships through a unique and innovative model. The ERF has empowered existing groups and eight new business forums are planned.

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There is uncertainty over the direct impact of the ERF on protecting jobs and businesses, which is hard to ascertain for a programme of this scale and type. However, stakeholders clearly articulated the wider, social impacts of the interventions and believed the future strategic objectives should capture this.

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#### **RETAIL BUSINESS REPRESENTATION, DELIVERY AND AUTONOMY**

The improved picture of the representative networks across the city, enhanced understanding of district business needs and the improved foundations upon which further work can be built are clear outcomes of the ERF. Yet, large gaps persist across the city, a vacuum that cannot always be filled by other community organisations without questions over the representativeness of retail business interests.

The limited skills, experience and capacity and lack of local business champions in some areas of Sheffield means there is a risk that the parts of the city most in need of support and funds miss out on opportunities like the ERF.

The focus on district autonomy was a strength of the ERF and was widely supported by stakeholders. However, there were concerns over the tension between district autonomy and meeting the procedural needs of SCC and their contractual obligations to third party delivery providers. There is also a need for greater, and earlier, clarity over the scope of deliverables.

The infographic on the next page shows what the ERF has delivered as of September 2022.

## As of September 2022 the ERF has delivered:



**15**  
community  
events



**5**  
banner  
installation  
programmes



**1**  
arts trail



**3**  
bench  
installation  
programmes



**1**  
park safety  
improvement  
programme



**3**  
bin  
installation  
programmes



**2**  
shopfront  
competitions



**4**  
Christmas  
light  
installation/  
infrastructure  
programmes



**2**  
shopfront  
improvement  
programmes



**2**  
parklets



## As of September 2022 the ERF has delivered:



**1**  
purchase  
of market  
infrastructure



**1**  
street art  
installation  
programme



**1**  
photography  
exhibition



**1**  
creative  
employment  
programme



**1**  
car parking  
improvement  
scheme



**4**  
marketing  
campaigns



**1**  
tree planting  
programme



**8**  
new retail  
business  
forums  
launched or  
planned

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## IMPACT AND LEGACY

There is a wealth of experience and examples from the round one of ERF to inform future iterations of the programme. SCC's attempts to support businesses in district centres and local autonomy was praised and stakeholders would like this approach to continue in the future.

The ongoing ERF legacy is a concern and how to keep, and grow, the impetus, understanding and expertise developed during the programme.

Whilst the ERF did catalyse and support the creation of increased levels of retail business community collaboration, the continued development, spread and survival of these groups requires significant ongoing support and momentum.

The social value impact of the ERF is clear with a net social return of between £1.99 and £2.24 per £1 spent. As the above infographic highlights, a variety of tangible impacts were fostered that will continue to benefit the local district centres for years to come and have helped improve the perceptions of local public spaces.

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## THE FUTURE OF THE ERF

There is a real appetite for future iterations of the ERF amongst all key stakeholders. Across Sheffield, the ERF has provided an obvious boost to district centres with significant levels of positive feedback from businesses, residents, Council representatives and community figures.

The local autonomy over the design and delivery of interventions and the creativity this enabled was welcomed and stakeholders are very keen this is replicated in future programmes.

Future ERF rounds will be boosted by the improved and empowered business networks across the city. The flexible, supportive, and iterative application process was praised by stakeholders and should continue.

Round one of the ERF has highlighted the importance of a series of ERF champions across all levels of the programme. It has also provided a wealth of examples, models and outputs which could provide prospective applicants with models of best practice, different organisational and delivery models, and outputs to select from.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Sheffield City Council may wish to consider the following recommendations:

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### STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Lengthen the timescales for each stage of the ERF from the application stages to delivery to increase the opportunities for success.

**Recommendation 2:** Improve the monitoring of ERF funded projects for example with bi-monthly progress forms which have been co-designed with the delivery team and providing support through Business Information Officers were required.

**Recommendation 3:** Establish data collection procedures for ERF funded events to improve understanding of the quantitative impacts of interventions.

**Recommendation 4:** Agree tailored milestones with each successful application before project inception to ensure projects are delivered in a timely manner and identify where targeted support may be required.

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**Recommendation 5:** Create a guide for potential applicants, using the examples and lessons from the ERF Round 1, to improve clarity and understanding of the requirements, scope, and processes of ERF during the application process. This could inform a 'self-assessment' for applications and highlight areas of support.

**Recommendation 6:** Consider options to make the application process more inclusive and accessible for example creating a 'pitch stage' or visits to potential locations.

**Recommendation 7:** Continue the successful iterative and flexible approach to the application process which accommodates a variety of applicants, experiences, and expertise.

**Recommendation 8:** Improve the efficiency of the contract stage by increasing the information collected within applications surrounding due diligence processes.

**Recommendation 9:** Establish a cut-off date for applications to allow more time for a consistently rigorous scoring process for small pot applications.

**Recommendation 10:** Increase the diversity of the Steering Group to be more reflective of the communities across the ERF supports across Sheffield.

**Recommendation 11:** Align the ERF activity and wider Sheffield City Council plans and priorities. For example, further developing the ERF objectives to reflect the clear social value benefits created during ERF Round 1.

**Recommendation 12:** Explore longer-term options to integrate business voices into the Local Area Committees and promote opportunities for collaboration between the committees and local business groups.

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#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DELIVERY

**Recommendation 13:** Ensure project steering groups are equipped with appropriate administrative experience and time to oversee the local ERF delivery.

**Recommendation 14:** Establish clear project management criteria which potential project managers can be assessed against to understand their suitability and support needs.

**Recommendation 15:** Continue to promote the use of paying for project management time.

**Recommendation 16:** Create a project managers support network where people can connect, mentor one another, update on projects, and share best practice.

**Recommendation 17:** Share lessons and best practice from the ERF Round 1 through a workshop with new project leads during the early stages of ERF Round 2.

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#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING CONDITIONS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS – CAPACITY, COMMUNITIES AND LEGACY

**Recommendation 18:** Provide more capacity to delivery staff supporting the ERF, including Sheffield City Council staff and the Business Information Officers, so that they can continue to support and facilitate the ERF.

**Recommendation 19:** Explore the potential for a separate dedicated fund to support potential applicants with a lack of capacity to apply normally. This can ensure the ERF is accessible to all communities of Sheffield.

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**Recommendation 20:** Continue working with applicants to understand local capacity and skills challenges and provide extra support to those who need it. For example, pairing potential applicants with a local project manager or voluntary or community organisation.

**Recommendation 21:** Continue to support the project teams and business forums created in ERF Round 1 to help maintain its legacy.

**Recommendation 22:** Create the conditions for sustainable business networks at a local level. For example, by using existing community networks to catalyse collaboration.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kada Research was commissioned by Sheffield City Council (SCC) to evaluate their £2m Economic Recovery Fund (ERF). The ERF was launched in March 2021 providing £2 million in Sheffield City Council funds to support high street recovery in district centres. Applications were welcomed from collaborations with innovative ideas to increase demand and footfall to re-energise their local high street. The ERF placed an emphasis on local autonomy, collaboration and decision making. Of the fifteen successful applications, eight received up to £50,000 in funds and seven received up to £200,000 in funds.

The Fund also gave grants to eleven projects that formed part of the 2021 Summer in the Outdoor City campaign. These projects are the subject to a separate evaluation, having taken place earlier and having been focused on city centre events, the two parts of the project were seen to be distinct.

The evaluation investigated: the fund's achievements in terms of key outputs/impacts; what worked well and what elements should be taken forward into a future iteration of the fund; areas that did not work as well and how they could be rectified; and how the ERF approach could inform future district centre work.

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

Sheffield City Council (SCC) launched the Economic Recovery Fund (ERF) in March 2021, allocating funding of £2m for high street recovery activities in district centres. Applicants could apply for funding to deliver projects that supported post-lockdown reopening, stimulated demand on district high streets and helped businesses to adapt and thrive in the post-Covid-19 world. Two grants were made available; larger projects could apply for £200,000 and smaller projects could apply for £50,000 in funding. A SCC led steering group (Appendix One) oversaw the foundation of ERF, its key elements, the application process, the scoring process, and ongoing delivery.

The ERF fund was publicly announced on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 with a soft press release with quotes from Cllr Iqbal (then Cabinet Member for Business and Investment and Chair of the ERF Steering Group), Louisa Harrison-Walker (Sheffield Chamber of Commerce), and Emma Marshall (Sheffield Chamber of Commerce).

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Applications could be drawn up and led by private sector collaborations or from within the Council but with a clear stipulation that they had to demonstrate collaborative practice, co-investment, and a demonstrable degree of local business consensus. Applicants had to represent a partnership or collaboration with a named lead organisation.

An emphasis was placed upon harnessing local knowledge and business understanding and empowering local groups/organisations to lead on fresh initiatives that would best suit their local area. The fund was designed to incentivise local business collaboration, bringing a legacy of increased consensus working and relationships to support local-led decision making.

The ERF has four key objectives:

- Supporting local economic recovery; helping Sheffield's businesses and district centres to rebuild and grow.
- Helping businesses to reopen safely and remain viable – building resilience to future economic changes
- Protecting jobs and businesses, particularly in the hardest hit sectors
- Generating demand, bringing back customers and promoting consumer confidence – encouraging people to shop locally and buy from independent stores

These intentionally broad objectives put the emphasis on applicants to formulate ideas suited to their district centres. This was intended to develop a new approach focused on local autonomy, collaboration, and empowerment of local groups. It was also hoped that ERF work would feed directly into the work on the newly created Local Area Committees. The ERF Guidance Document contained in the appendix provides further detail on the programme.

Tables of successful and unsuccessful applicants are contained within the appendix.

## 1.2 EVALUATION AIMS AND APPROACH

The study structure and approach were co-designed with SCC Delivery Management Team. The key elements included:

- An **inception stage** where the delivery team and Kada Research worked together to develop a project implementation workplan, topic guides, stakeholder lists, source key intelligence/data, build contextual and strategic awareness and to agree key milestones, a shared methodology, rationale, and objectives.
- A **desk review** to build an understanding of the wider strategic context, collate intelligence/data, project progress, and comparator projects.
- **24 Stakeholder discussions** with leading members of the steering group, Business Information Officers, project leads and the delivery team.
- **Primary research** with visits to five districts in receipt of funds with the Business Information Officers. These looked at delivery so far, future deliver and sought feedback from local businesses with a particular focus upon impact and legacy.
- **Impact assessment** evaluating the quantitative and qualitative information with a focus upon social and economic impact, return on investment and wider benefits.
- **Reporting and presentation** of the key findings and recommendations. A presentation was created for the Economic Development and Skills Policy Committee with the full findings contained within this report.

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The evaluation investigated:

- ERF achievements, outputs, and impacts
- what worked well and what elements should be taken forward into future rounds
- areas that did not work as well and how they could be rectified
- how the ERF approach could inform future district centre work.

The report will consider the ERF programme evaluating the application and scoring process, project delivery, impacts, its legacy, future and concluding points/recommendations.

### 1.3 REPORT STRUCTURE

This report consists of seven chapters:

Chapter 2 considers political, strategic and city context, looking at the national and regional context that has shaped the programme.

Chapter 3 evaluates the social and economic impact of the programme using a social value impact tool to measure the social value impact.

Chapter 4 considers the application process using stakeholder feedback to evaluate its strengths and suggested areas of improvements. Chapter 5 evaluates the delivery process/experience using pen portraits of each of the projects to provide specific project details.

Chapter 6 explores the impact of the ERF in terms of community empowerment and collaboration.

The concluding points are outlined in Chapter 7 with reflections made on its legacy and future. The report is completed in Chapter 8 with an outline of key strategic, operational and project delivery recommendations.

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## 2. STRATEGIC AND CITY CONTEXT

This chapter highlights the significant challenges high streets across the UK faced due to the impacts of Covid-19. To address these unprecedented challenges, a range of Government and local interventions were introduced. The ERF is focused upon meeting the challenges, aims and objectives outlined in Sheffield's One Year Plan and has an innovative and unique approach to district high street recovery.

### 2.1 THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID

The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and ensuing lockdowns, upon the global and UK economy was described by the World Bank as "the largest economic crisis in more than a century<sup>1</sup>. During 2020, global GDP fell by 3.4%, with over \$2 trillion<sup>2</sup> lost in global economic output. Within the UK, GDP declined by 9.7% during 2020, the largest decrease since records began in 1948<sup>3</sup>. The economic impact of the first lockdown was particularly acute with a GDP decrease of 25% in the two months between February and April 2020. The ongoing economic impact of Covid-19, coupled with rising inflation and interest rates led to the Bank of England to project that the UK would enter a recession in the fourth quarter of 2022<sup>4</sup>.

With new laws severely restricting movement introduced across the world, large increases in unemployment and reduced global demand, the retail sector has been badly impacted. The UK's first national lockdown closed all non-essential retail stores between March and July 2020, with a series of lockdowns occurring until spring 2021.

During 2020, total retail sales fell by 1.9% (compared to 2019), the largest recorded annual fall<sup>5</sup>. However, this figure is not representative of Covid 19's impact upon high street retail, with large increases in online sales during this period masking a much greater decline in high street spending. ONS records show online sales rose to a record 37.8% of all retail spending in January 2021, an increase of 17.6% from the previous January<sup>6</sup>. Centre for Cities calculated during the period March 2020 to September 2021 city and town centres lost an average of 33 weeks of sales and an average increase of 3.3% in vacancy rates (as high as 8% in some cities)<sup>7</sup>.

The suburban/district centres of UK cities were not as negatively affected by the lockdowns, with factors such as home working helping to mitigate some of the impact. Yet, Centre for Cities found these centres still lost on average nine weeks of sales between March and September 2020 with the retail and fashion

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank (2022). 'World Development Report 2022'. [Available here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Statista (2022). 'Impact of Coronavirus on the Global Economy'. [Available here](#).

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Library (2021). 'Coronavirus: Economic Impact'. [Available here](#).

<sup>4</sup> Bank of England (2022). 'Monetary Policy Report'. [Available here](#).

<sup>5</sup> ONS (2021). 'Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic on Retail Sales in 2020'. [Available here](#).

<sup>6</sup> University of Reading Business School. 'Have we Reached Peak Online Sales?'. [Available here](#).

<sup>7</sup> Centre for Cities (2022). 'Cities Outlook 2022'. [Available here](#).



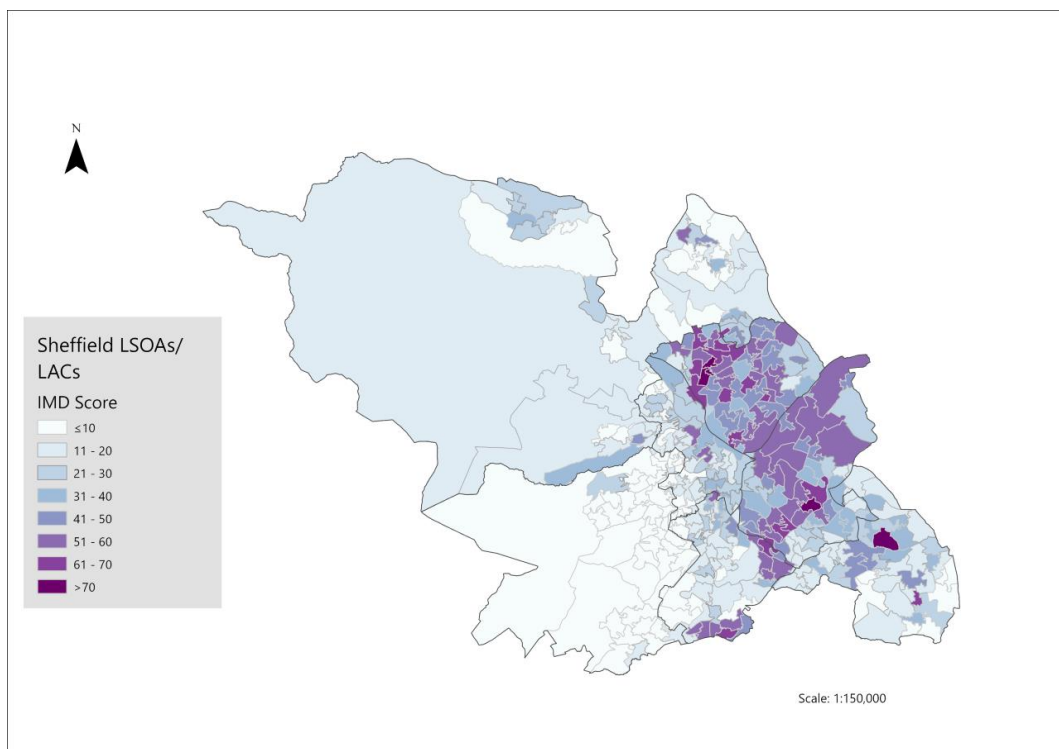
sectors particularly badly hit (as opposed to food & drink)<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, the increased cost of living and predicted recession will have a significant dampening effect upon demand across all areas of the UK economy.

Moving forward, longer-term predictions by consumer credit company Experian forecast limited growth in convenience good sales per head with minimal annual growth of 0.1% up until 2040<sup>9</sup>. They forecast a more positive picture for comparison goods sales with annual growth of between 2.8% and 2.9% up until 2040.

## 2.2 SHEFFIELD CITY CONTEXT

The Sheffield Economic Evidence base highlights<sup>10</sup> the profound impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon the city. It has changed why and how people travel, increased pre-existing education, health, and economic inequalities, impacted the local labour market and placed large pressure upon the city's social networks and business community. The map below highlights the economic inequalities that exist across the city.

### Index of Multiple Deprivation Score of Sheffield LSOA



Source: ONS (2022) 'English indices of deprivation 2019' (File 7). Contains National Statistics data licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 © Crown copyright and database right 2022. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2022

The retail, hospitality and cultural sectors have been particularly affected with closures, uncertainty, and associated reductions in demand. The Centre for Cities High Street Recovery Index has highlighted an

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Experian (2022). 'Retail Planner Briefing Note 19'

<sup>10</sup> Kada Research (2022). Economic Evidence Base.

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improved picture for Sheffield’s City Centre with a weekday index score<sup>11</sup> of 103 and a weekend index score of 127<sup>12</sup> indicating a significant resurgence in city centre footfall during 2021 and early 2022.

However, Sheffield has a vacancy rate of 18% which is above the national average of 14%<sup>13</sup>. The loss of large high street names from Sheffield City Centre, such as John Lewis and Debenhams, is indicative of a wider restructuring of the retail sector as it continues to adapt to modern shopping habits. This situation is exacerbated within Sheffield by the presence of Meadowhall, an out-of-town shopping centre attracting the largest share of the city’s comparative good’s market spend.

## 2.3 DISTRICT CONTEXT

Sheffield’s district centres have not been immune to the same retail pressures as the wider retail market. Research from the Centre for Cities found UK footfall and spending data has “shown no clear signs of a work from home dividend for suburban high streets”<sup>14</sup> and high streets continue to experience turbulence from changing retail habits, increased energy bills and the cost-of-living crisis.

Recent research by Nexus Planning found that changing retail habits are placing increased pressure on district centres. The main food/convenience goods market share for Sheffield Authority areas outside the City Centre has fallen from 67.2% in 2016 to 65.6% in 2022.

That said, this research highlights a positive picture for district centres/retail parks in certain markets. The comparison goods market share for district areas/retail parks has increased by 19.7% during this period. Nexus attributed these changes to wider structural changes across the retail sector changes in working/ shopping patterns bringing higher expenditure in smaller centres<sup>15</sup>.

According to Nexus’ recent health check, vacancy rates are lower outside the city centre, with all but three of Sheffield’s district centres (Crystal Peaks, Woodseats and London Road) having a vacancy rate lower than the national average of 14.1%. They reported that “the large majority of Sheffield’s district centres are vital and viable”<sup>16</sup> with the centres that focused on convenience good retail and services performing particularly well.

This corresponds with Centre for Cities’ suburban centre research that found that district high streets have done better because they sell more essential goods<sup>17</sup>. The following areas were all found to be “vital and viable” district centres:

- Banner Cross
- Broomhill
- Chapeltown
- Chaucer



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<sup>11</sup> Compared to a pre lockdown baseline of 100.

<sup>12</sup> Centre for Cities (2022). High Street Recovery Tracker May 2022. [Available here](#).

<sup>13</sup> British Retail Consortium (2022). BRC Economic Summary Q2 2022. [Available here](#).

<sup>14</sup> Centre for Cities (2022). 'Does remote working help boost suburban high streets?' [Available here](#).

<sup>15</sup> Nexus Planning (2022). 'Sheffield Retail and Leisure Study'.

<sup>16</sup> Nexus Planning (2022). 'Sheffield Retail and Leisure Study'. Page 74.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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- Crookes
  - Ecclesall Road
  - Firth Park
  - Heeley
  - Spital Hill
  - Stocksbridge
  - Woodhouse

The report highlighted that Crystal Peaks, Manor Top, Darnall, Hillsborough, London Road and Woodseats all require bespoke support programmes to secure their long-term viability. Challenges cited include high vacancy rates, a reliance upon comparison goods, limited pedestrianisation and accessibility, limited daytime vibrancy and poor environmental quality.

Therefore, the ERF is reflective of a concern that Sheffield's district centres are vital assets that require attention, support, and funding to ensure they remain vital and viable in the current economic context.

## 2.4 UK POLICY CONTEXT

Across the world international, national, and regional governments, governmental organisations and central banks have introduced policies to mitigate against the impact of Covid-19.

### UK GOVERNMENT FURLOUGH SCHEME

This scheme, launched in March 2020, was designed to support employers and employees during enforced closures by using government funds to pay and retain staff. By the time of its closure in September 2021, 11.7m jobs had been furloughed at the cost of £70b. During March and April 2020, the most furloughed jobs were in the wholesale and retail sector with 1.85m workers furloughed from these sectors. Overall, the most claims were from the arts, entertainment, and recreation sectors with £12.87 billion claims made<sup>18</sup>.

### UK GOVERNMENT BUSINESS RATE RELIEF

In March 2020, the Government announced it was providing all retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses with a 100% business rate holiday until March 2021. This was extended by a further three months in the 2021 budget with a 66% reduction for the remaining nine months of the financial year.

### BUSINESS SUPPORT GRANTS

Grant support schemes were announced by the UK Government in 2020 as part of the pandemic economic response. The three schemes were as follows:

- March-August 2020. Retail, hospitality and leisure grants and small business grants.
- September 2020-March 2021. Local Restrictions Support Grants and Additional Restrictions Grant and the Close Business Lockdown Payment
- April 2021 onwards. Restart Grants, plus ongoing Additional Restrictions Grants.

### LOCAL AUTHORITY DISCRETIONARY GRANT FUND

In addition to these grants the UK Government announced an additional £617m grant with four categories of business prioritised to plug the gaps in the other schemes:

- Small businesses in shared offices or other flexible workspaces.
- Regular market traders with fixed building costs.
- Charity properties in receipt of charitable business rate relief.
- Bed & Breakfasts which pay Council Tax rather than business rates.

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<sup>18</sup> UK Parliament (2021). 'Examining the End of the Furlough Scheme'. [Available here](#).

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## WELCOME BACK FUND

In August 2021, it was announced that Councils across England would share £56m of ERDF funds to support post lockdown efforts to welcome people back to the high street. This followed on from the 2020 Reopening High Streets Safely Fund that was allocated to councils in 2020. The fund was designed to create safe and welcoming high streets through investment in the street scene, marketing campaigns, safety signage and increasing the number of green spaces.

## 2.5 LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

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### BUSINESS RECOVERY PLAN

In October 2020, the Business Recovery Plan was produced by the Sheffield Business Group – a mixture of Council and private sector representatives. It identified and outlined interventions to support efforts to help the business community to recover from the impact of the pandemic. The plan is formed of three phases: relief, recovery and renewal.

It highlighted the £100m of grant funding SCC had issued, and the support provided through Business Sheffield's helpline and business advisor sessions, which was a 'relief' measure. Reference was made to the impact of the pandemic on the high street with greatly reduced spend in shops bringing into question their long-term viability. It acknowledged how longer-term changes to the nature of the high street and shopping habits had been accelerated by the pandemic calling for future schemes that would support the retail and hospitality sectors. It also called for activity in Sheffield's district centres acknowledging the strong links community networks had with their local high streets and the role that they could have in delivering place-based activity.

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### OUR SHEFFIELD: ONE YEAR PLAN (OYP)

The 2021/2022 one-year plan recognised the impact that the pandemic had upon the city and its residents, and the profound social and economic consequences. The four chapters of the plan focused upon the challenges faced by a different aspect of the city, outlining how SCC intended to address them in the post Covid 19 context. Supporting and regenerating high streets was a key strand of the 'Climate Change, Economy and Development' chapter with the £2m ERF one of the main policies outlined.

A key objective of the plan is placing community, inclusion, and equality at the centre of strategic planning. It talks of resetting strategic partnerships with community and voluntary organisations and ensuring that every community in Sheffield has a "great local centre."<sup>19</sup>

The ERF has clear synchronicity with the OYP demonstrating a clear commitment to embedding local decision making into delivery. The ERF's focus upon collaboration and local empowerment was designed to directly act upon the OYP's commitment to enabling and supporting communities post Covid, whilst helping to foster local business recovery and growth.

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### UNIQUE NATURE OF THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY FUND

Both national and local governments have developed a wide variety of post covid economic recovery plans with many focused upon initiatives that drive a recovery in town/city centre footfall and a reimagining of the high street. What makes SCC's ERF programme unique is its focus upon community led district centre recovery, with few comparable programmes in the UK<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Sheffield City Council (2021). 'Our Sheffield: One Year Plan' Page 4.

<sup>20</sup> Hammersmith & Fulham's High Street Recovery Fund offered grants of up to £10,000 to help the local economy recover from the impact of Covid-19. It was open to collaborative business groups with imaginative project initiatives focused on high street growth/recovery.

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## 3. THE IMPACTS OF THE ERF

This chapter discusses the social value impact of the ERF with the variety of outputs, social value impacts and overwhelmingly positive feedback demonstrating the success of the ERF.

### 3.1 QUANTITATIVE CONSTRAINTS

Project outputs and spend have been collated by the central management team, with regular updates and output reporting in monthly meetings. Project reporting data has been used to inform elements of this evaluation.

Many of the interventions delivered have either been community events or public realm improvements, with limited baseline data available. A traditional economic impact model which focusses on job creation, GVA and productivity is not appropriate for this type of intervention. Therefore, we have undertaken a social value impact assessment to quantify the impact of the ERF outputs on the local communities and express these benefits in monetary or economic terms where possible.

### 3.2 SOCIAL VALUE IMPACT

To assess the social value impact of ERF we ran the data through a Social Value Engine<sup>21</sup>. The model uses a proxy measure to quantify the value of 'living in a good neighbourhood'. All project outputs achieved as of September 2022 were inputted to calculate the social value impact for each district with adjustments made for leakage, attribution, and drop off.

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#### BENEFICIARY POPULATION

Informed by project lead feedback and local population data we estimated the percentage of local residents benefitting from ERF activities. These figures ranged from 2% to 25% depending on the size and extent of each activity.

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#### LEAKAGE

Leakage describes the fact that not all benefits will be retained in the specific area in which a project is delivered. We have used an average of 40% leakage across all outputs being valued, which is classed as medium-high leakage in government appraisal guidance.

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#### ATTRIBUTION

In common with many social value benefits, it is difficult to directly attribute positive local resident feelings to specific project outputs without a comprehensive survey programme. Therefore, the attribution rates are a very conservative rate of 10% (i.e. 10% of the residents experiencing improved feelings about the neighbourhood would directly attribute these positive feelings to ERF outputs).

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#### DROP OFF

All the inputs were given a high drop off rate of 50% and impact duration of one year to account for the limited longevity and one-off nature of many of the outputs and the twelve-month length of ERF.

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<sup>21</sup> Fully accredited by Social Value UK and built around the Bristol Accord framework

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## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

After accounting for high rates of potential leakage, attribution and drop off and the limited longevity of many of the impacts, the total present value (TPV) of the ERF Round 1 is £5,970,143. The Net Present Value (NPV) (ie TPV minus the programme cost) is £3,970,143. This NPV generates a benefit-cost ratio range if 1.99:1 to 2.24: 1, or a return of **between £1.99 and £2.24 per every £1 spent**.

## 3.4 PROJECT OUTPUTS

As the infographic contained within the Executive Summary highlights, **ERF has delivered 56 outputs as of September 2022**. The following 14 outputs are planned for future delivery before March 2023:

- One marketing website
- Four public art installation programmes
- One bench installation programme
- Six community events
- One green wall installation programme
- One shop front improvement programme

## 3.5 BUSINESS FEEDBACK

As part of the evaluation, five visits were made to district centres in receipt of ERF where a variety of local businesses were spoken to about the impact of ERF. Most were positive with frequent references made to increased levels of footfall on the days of events and positive customer feedback about public realm and shopfront improvements.

*"Lots of my customers have commented on the new shopfront and how they like the fact that money has been spent in the area"*



*"It is definitely busier on market days. It has had an impact upon footfall"*

*"The new bins and regular collections have made a real impact; you only have to look out the front to see"*

The project leads were asked to rate their local project in terms of impact (1 being the lowest and 10 the greatest impact), they provided an average score of 7.5. This reflects activity delivered to date and we expect this score to increase once projects have been completed. Some initial scepticism has been overcome as the full impact of ERF projects has become more apparent.

*"The feedback about the Christmas lights has been phenomenal, people want more"*

*"I've not heard a negative word said about the work we delivered. Some businesses who were very reluctant to start off with are now helping to maintain it."*

*"One of my customers said that he had seen a friend at one of his markets that he hadn't seen for twenty years despite still living in the area"*

### 3.6 PROJECT SPEND

As of late September 2022, £1,298,570 was forecasted to be spent across all the district centre projects<sup>22</sup>. With £1,311,114 allocated against these means there is to date a forecast underspend of £12,544.

#### Project Spend and Variation from Allocation

Project	Contract Value	Forecast Spend	Variation from allocation
Abbeydale Street Trees	£18,180	£16,680	-£1,500
Angel Street	£48,670	£48,670	-
Broomhill	£200,000	£193,701	-£6,299
Chapelton	£50,000	£60,284	+£10,284 <sup>23</sup>
Creative Industries Quarter	£100,000	£100,000	-
Firth Park	£196,417	£182,331	-£14,087
Hillsborough	£200,000	£212,004	+£12,004
Manor Park	£49,341	£49,341	-
Mosborough	£45,731	£33,219	-£12,511
Nether Edge	£49,262	£49,262	-
Page Hall	£49,135	£49,135	-
Spital Hill	£49,709	£49,709	-
Totley Rise	£4,984	£4,550	-£434
Walkley	£199,686	£199,686	-
Woodhouse	£49,998	£49,998	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,311,114</b>	<b>£1,298,570</b>	<b>-£12,544</b>

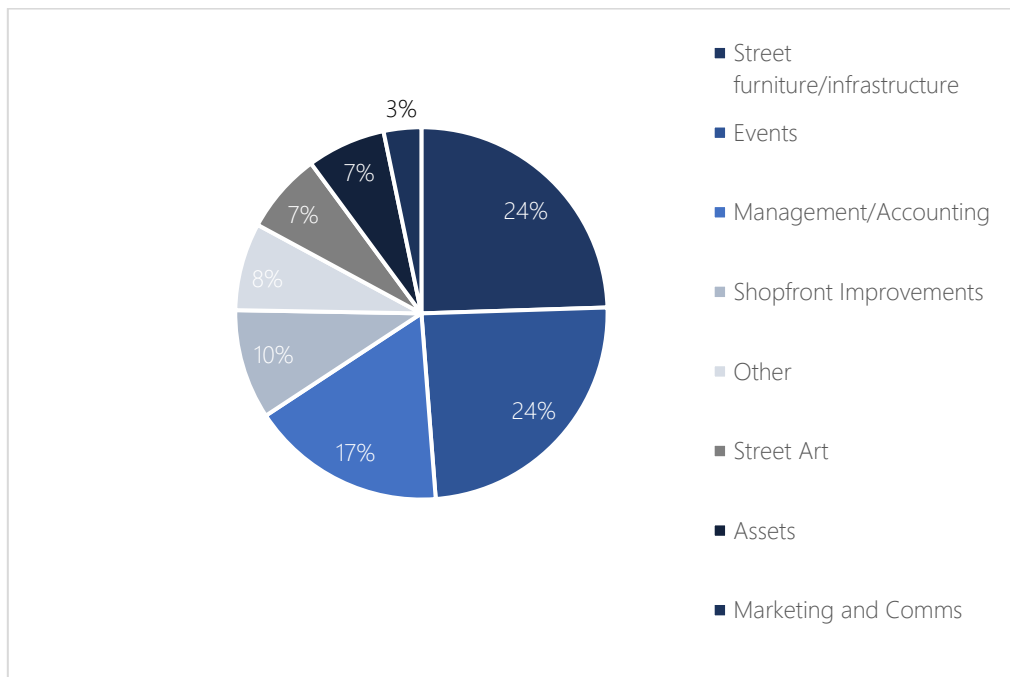
This underspend is reflective of successful financial oversight of the programme. Frequent monitoring meetings were held with the project teams to ensure that overspend did not occur. Where projects went over budget this was the result of approved variances to meet unforeseen costs. Delivering the programme slightly under budget was a notable achievement when considering the first-time nature and complexity of the programme.

<sup>22</sup> Please note that this figure does not include other associated costs such as communication support, consultation/evaluation services, research or business information officer costs.

<sup>23</sup> Please note that where a project exceeded its budget this was a result of approved variances, not overspend, in order to meet unforeseen costs.

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## ERF Spend by Type



The largest proportion of ERF monies was spent upon events and street furniture/infrastructure (25% respectively). Management/accounting was the third highest area of spend (18%). Shopfront improvement work accounted for 10% of spend, street art work and the purchase of assets both 7% and marketing and comms 3%. This indicative split of costs is reflective of the broad mix of activities that projects have and/or intend to deliver, and their associated costs.

Delivering events and installing new infrastructure is more costly than marketing campaigns or assets and they were elements that many projects wanted to pursue. Therefore, they make up a larger proportion of all ERF costs.

Given the scale and associated cost, only the larger scale projects had the resources to undertake shop front improvement schemes. Project and financial management costs were designated as eligible costs in recognition of the fact that these skills/capacities were often required to support delivery<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> These costs were normally capped at 5% of the total project cost.



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## 4. INITIATING ERF

This chapter discusses the stakeholder findings evaluating all stages of the application process from the expression of interest to scoring. The open, iterative, and flexible application process was well received, and it supported a range of locally led solutions helping to increase a sense of community. The application process highlighted the importance of local community networks, applicant's experience, expertise, and capacity. Applicant support by the project team and Information Officers was key to ensuring a wide geographical spread of applications. In total, 15 project applications from district centres were successful from across the city.

### 4.1 CREATING THE ERF

#### THE ERF OBJECTIVES

*"There was a really strong sense that district centres and local high streets were really struggling. Many felt that footfall had fallen off a cliff"*

Stakeholders had a good understanding of the ERF objectives particularly supporting businesses recovery, bringing people back into the district centres, and helping to increase demand and footfall. As one stakeholder explained, the ERF was created to "...help businesses and people thrive and come together through the communities".

Yet, there was also recognition that during the process the ERF extended beyond its original objectives towards wider social and community benefits.

*"What happened was so much greater than that, and it kind of, you know, through all of these events they gave us some pride back"*

#### MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The ERF was launched online with a specific page on the SCC website containing key information, links and guidance to application documentation and contact details. A social media campaign was launched using existing SCC handles. Existing stakeholder communication channels were used to engage with city partners, business forums and umbrella organisations. Virtual briefing sessions were also scheduled to support potential applicants that were looking for more information. Business Information Officers also played a vital role in raising awareness locally of ERF and articulating its key aims and objectives.

This process was successful in generating significant levels of interest, with over 80 initial expressions of interest leading to 51 full applications for district centre projects.

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## COMMISSIONING

An early decision was taken by the steering group and Council members to pursue a competitive commissioning process which welcomed applications from district centres across the city. A supportive approach was adopted with SCC officers assisting areas with their applications to ensure that a balance was struck between local autonomy and a high standard of application.

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## ERF APPLICATION DESIGN

The open nature of the application process provided wide scope to prospective applicants to choose their own deliverables. This was an acknowledgement that local business communities were best placed to know the economic recovery needs for their district and how best achieve it. Groups were able to direct funds towards their locally chosen priorities and achieve the ERF aim of “helping economic recovery at a local level”.

*“The spend going in lots of different directions is not a bad thing, economic recovery means lots of different things to different people”.*

A desire to see collaboration, local autonomy, decision making, and agency was put at the centre of the application design with the steering group keen to see businesses working together to submit applications. In fact, empowering and developing community networks was a key desired legacy of ERF that was very well received by both district communities and Council representatives.

*“We believed that there is real strength in coming up from the grassroots, getting people to work together, and that the people closest to decisions making impact are the experts and they should be involved”*

Applications were designed to ensure successful projects had a clear aligned vision and evidenced plan of how they would deliver the outputs and achieve value for money.

The open nature of the application process created challenges for Sheffield City Council in the latter stages of the process. In some cases, information to demonstrate eligibility and compliance were missing which made meeting due diligence processes lengthy and labour intensive. Learning from this experience should inform the application design in future ERF rounds.

The Steering Group also designed the method for scoring applications, based on five criteria:

1. **Alignment of Project Aims** – The project aims were audited against the Funds’ aims with a particular focus upon ensuring that the bids focused upon collaborative efforts to boost footfall to the district shopping centres.
2. **Clarity of the Proposal** – The applications were scrutinised in terms of how clear they were, how easy they were to understand and, in the case of the larger projects, whether they were of sufficient scale and reach.
3. **Addressing a real problem** – The proposals were analysed for how clear their rationale and evidence base was and whether their focus was addressing a well-recognised issue/problem.
4. **Strength of Project Management Team** – The steering group considered whether they believed that the project appeared to be deliverable and whether the application was supported by a realistic well outlined plan with milestones, timescales and demonstrated capacity and capability.
5. **Value for Money** – Applications had to demonstrate that they offered clear value for money, with clear outputs and an outline of how they would make an impact to a local district.

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## 4.2 APPLICATION PROCESS

The smaller project application process was run as an open call on a rolling basis whereas the larger project application process had two-stages. Applicants had to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form outlining their concepts, ideas, and collaborative processes/ideas. The strongest scoring EOIs were invited to submit a full application and SCC worked with bidders to demonstrate the viability and value for money of applications.

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### EASE OF APPLYING

The previous experience and current capacity of applicants determined how easy bidders found the process. Having a clearly defined community group or leader also made it easier for applicants to work through the process. One stakeholder explained the local business champions were a critical success factor in whether an area applied or not.

*"It worked well when communities came together, understood what they want and had the skills to deliver."*

The process was more challenging for applicants with less experience and capacity, or without a clear lead group or individual. Establishing genuine community interest in projects and bids was especially challenging.

*"The difficulty that they had was collectively pulling together a committee to be able to come up with a kind of solution. And what again, we found was that those communities that tried to put in an application without any professional support struggled because they didn't quite get the kind of application right."*

The steering group has stressed the importance of communities having a shared vision and a clear understanding of the skills required to support delivery. Challenges arose for applicants when communities were unable to agree on a vision due to conflicting views, or where there was a lack of skills and resources to deliver the project. A difficulty often exacerbated by the absence of a local business representative group or where the active local business group did not cover the whole district area. Stakeholders noted these bids were often not as well written or put together and that in some cases this was the reason behind areas failing to apply.

Stakeholders also reported that local ERF champions did in some cases accelerate the creation of community consensus on how to best support local businesses. However, some stakeholders raised concerns over whether the groups created always accurately reflected business need.

*"There wasn't really a business community, you might have pockets, where neighbouring businesses are friendly with each other help, but the idea of establishing a formal business community needs another level of thinking and maybe a continued pot of money."*

*"Where a community network/co-ordinator existed the application process they were more successful but in a lot of areas there were a lot of difficulties in bringing a community together."*

Similarly, BIOs reported several factors which prevented some districts from submitting applications. These were: limited community networks; lack of local business consensus; insufficient capacity and time; lack of previous experience of bid writing; and language difficulties.

*"Retailers often haven't got the time to do it. Yeah. Because obviously they've got the business to run."*

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*"The community team had no experience in bid writing and evidence-based decision making and they struggled to justify what could be done. They required a lot of help with structure and iterative improvements before it could be submitted."*

The BIOs were often the conduits through which an application was established but for some, the barriers proved to be insurmountable.

In several cases, applicants received support from the Council during the process. This was greatly received with positive feedback given about the support. However, resource constraints within the Council meant this was not received by all applicants.

Stakeholders suggest some difficulties within the application process could be overcome by publishing more guidance and a clear application blueprint on the SCC website. Stakeholders also felt more information was required to manage the expectations of applicants about the ERF process from application to delivery.

*"It would be good to look at exemplars and case studies of what the projects have done this year and put those on a website to help people. To bring it alive, because literally, people were less than working from a blank sheet."*

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## PROJECT SCOPE

Stakeholders have reported a lack of clarity and mixed messaging on which delivery outcomes were within the scope of ERF. This resulted in challenges later in the process.

For example, some projects were several months into their application and outline budget/procurement stage before discovering their planned deliverables were not within scope. This caused some frustration over the lost time and misplaced effort on behalf of the project teams and others who had volunteered their time and skills. In one case, a project team lost three of their community team when it became clear what they proposed was not deliverable, whilst another project lost their project lead.

*"75% of local businesses would not necessarily have understood what was in scope"*

SCC's contractual obligations to their delivery partners also restricted what the project teams could deliver. Some stakeholders reported that this could undermine the open nature of the application and ERF's focus upon local agency. This is a tension that one stakeholder felt was inevitable as very creative options would always be constrained by what is deliverable. Within this context key stakeholders are in agreement that a 'menu' of deliverable options would be a welcome addition to future iterations of the programme.

## 4.3 EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

The EOI stage enabled initial scoping of potential applicants. In 27 cases, informal enquiries for smaller project funding did not lead to an application being submitted. This often resulted from dialogue with SCC staff who advised that the proposal was not in scope. Unsuccessful EOIs tended to be from local businesses requiring support with improvements. Early interest from BIOs in Grenoside, High Green, Ecclesfield, and Hackenthorpe did not result in final applications as they were unable to form a coalition on which to build a full application.

The larger project funding received 19 formal EOIs. Each EOI went through a scoring process that scored them on three of the five criteria (alignment of project aims, clarity of the proposal and addressing a real problem). Eight applications received high enough scores to progress to the full scoring process. On

average the unsuccessful applications scored best on alignment of project aims (2.09/5) and worst on addressing a real problem (1.81/5).

## SCORING PROCESS

With project leads coming from a wide variety of backgrounds the Steering Group wanted confidence they had sufficient skills to manage and deliver large funding programmes. All larger projects that passed the EOI scoring process then had to submit a fuller application and were scored on all five criteria. The ability of the project management team to effectively deliver their outlined project was a central aspect of the application scoring process for the full applications.

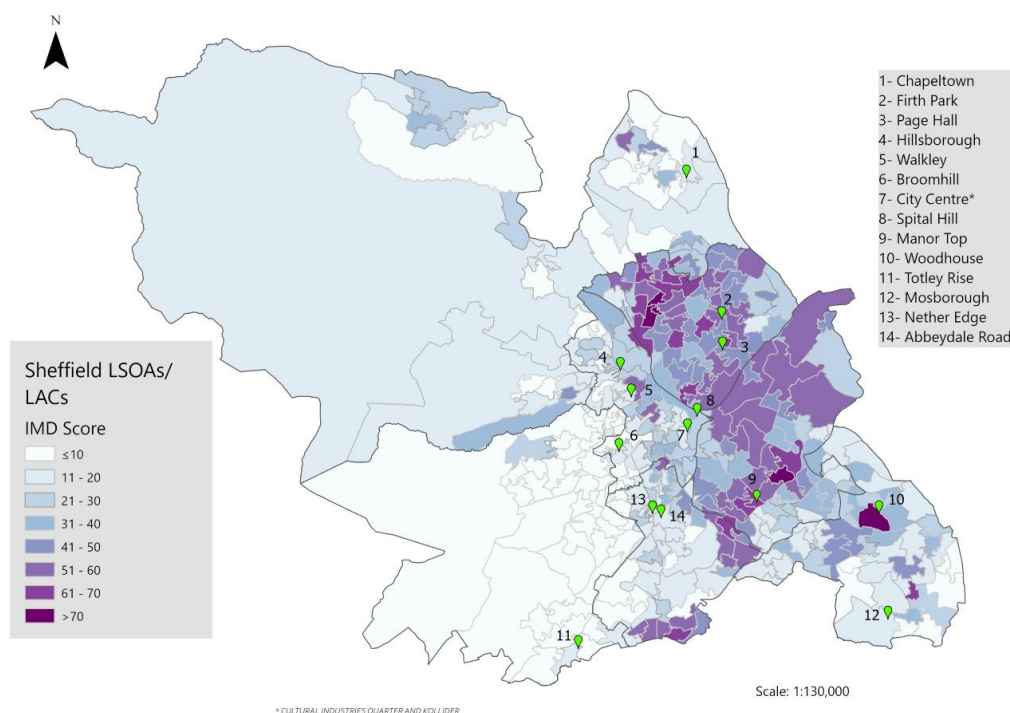
All successful applicants scored at least 3 out of 5 for project management ('acceptable response' or higher), demonstrating a credible plan for project delivery. In contrast, the average project management score for the nine unsuccessful applications was 2.11, with no project scoring higher than 2.5.

Stakeholders reported that the scoring process had been thorough, with effort made to ensure full and varied dialogue, transparency, objectivity, clarity of feedback and, where possible, the removal of unconscious bias. The competitive element of the funding was also seen by some stakeholders as essential to ensuring that stronger bids came through. It was also important for the Steering Group to consider the potential impact for each intervention.

The scoring process for small projects was ongoing, with applications being assessed upon submission rather than being scored together following an application cut-off date. This created challenges for the steering group and concerns over rigour and fairness in assessing applications over time.

## 4.4 GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF APPLICATIONS

Applications came from district centres across the city, with just the more rural north west part of the local authority not having an ERF project. The map below shows the areas which received funds, including the successful applications from more deprived areas of the city.



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Source: ONS (2022) 'English indices of deprivation 2019' (File 7). Contains National Statistics data licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 © Crown copyright and database right 2022. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2022

The application process highlighted areas of the city that did or did not have a strong enough community networks to underpin a bid. The steering group quickly recognised the limited geographical spread of applications and that those from more deprived parts of the city tended to need more support during the application process.

*"Quite often the places that are in the most need are the ones that are least likely to have the community required for an application"*

Therefore, contingency plans were created to make the process more inclusive. Support came from BIODs who were well placed to bring together a group and co-ordinate an application in areas that had not submitted any. Pro-active support was also provided to improve the standard of some of the borderline applications. Feedback and guidance were offered to the large project applications who were on the cusp of receiving a pass. In the case of Nether Edge, Spital Hill and Site Gallery this support resulted in successful applications.

*"The council did offer support through the business support officers who had to work hard to reach the communities and make up the deficit."*

The extra support from BIODs increased the number of applications received. However, the need for a quick turnaround time and limited capacity of BIODs restricted the amount of outreach work they could undertake. Their efforts to support applications were also impacted by limited business numbers, high turnover of business ownership and a wide geographical spread of business across certain areas.

Applications came from a variety of different groups and organisations. Some, such as the Firth Park application, worked through an existing community forum whereas in other areas a long-established CVO took responsibility for the bid, such as Zest in Upperthorpe/Walkley. In the case of Firth Park this strong pre-existing community network had a strong local steering and delivery group to shape a successful bid. This is something that was absent in areas that struggling to formulate bids. Other areas were supported by the BIODs who brought different businesses together and in two areas, Spital Hill and Mosborough, the final application was completed by a local councillor. Another approach saw a single business/institution take the lead on the application, such as Kollider for the Angel Street application and Site Gallery on the Cultural Industries Quarter application.

Several stakeholders called for increased support in future ERF iterations to help address the skills/capacity/organisational challenges faced by many communities and those without an obvious local business champion. They explained the positive community building impact of the ERF required further focus to ensure a wider geographical spread of application across the city.

*"Places that had a strong community did well, but there were other places where that community was developed to access the grants. This puts them in a stronger position for the future."*

*"There is a need for some form of capacity building support for future programmes because if you are starting from scratch to form a business community it might not happen in a month."*

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## Project Applicant/Lead Organisation by Area

Area	Applicant/Lead Organisation
Abbeydale Road	Abbeydale Street Trees
Angel Street	Angel Street Kinema
Broomhill	Broomhill Independent Traders Association
Chapelton	Choose Chapelton
Creative Industries Quarter	Site Gallery
Firth Park	Firth Park Forum
Hillsborough	Hillsborough Regeneration Project
Manor Park	Manor & Castle Development Trust
Mosborough	Clive Betts MP
Nether Edge	Grow UK
Page Hall	Firvale Community Hubs
Spital Hill	Reach Up Youth
Totley Rise	Alan Ball Business Information Officer
Walkley	Zest Community
Woodhouse	Norfolk Park T.A.R.A.

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## 5. DELIVERY EXPERIENCE

This chapter details stakeholders' experiences of the ERF delivery evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the differing approaches taken to delivery and the overall management/governance structure within which they were operating.

All 15 projects are on track to successfully deliver the interventions with one receiving extra support to ensure future delivery. This is indicative of the success of ERF and its flexible, supportive, and iterative approach. Project management expertise, experience and capacity is key to delivery and challenges arose where this was missing or stretched. Whilst the support from Sheffield City Council was praised, the complexity and intensity of ERF delivery did, on occasion, put pressure on staff resources.

### 5.1 DELIVERY LEADS



Project leads were responsible for local delivery, with the support of wider project delivery teams. Project Leads came from a wide range of backgrounds, with differing levels of expertise and previous experience. In Manor Park, Walkley and Page Hall, community and voluntary groups were brought in to support and lead delivery. In Chapeltown, Hillsborough and Trolley Rise a local business owner led delivery with the support of the BIODs. In Mosborough, Spital Hill,

and Firth Park the local councillors took a lead delivery role, working with other community groups and representatives. In Woodhouse, Broomhill, Nether Edge, Angel Street (Kinema) and Abbeydale Road delivery was led solely by local businesses or community groups. The Cultural Industry Quarter (Site Gallery) project was run by a contracted project manager commissioned by the local steering group.

All project leads except for Page Hall were interviewed about their delivery approach and experiences which inform this chapter. The project leads, often with local support behind them, were crucial in the delivery of the planned interventions and championed ERF within the districts. A coalition of local support



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eased the path for project leads as did the support from BIODs. In areas without local consensus and support, the project lead role was more challenging.

## 5.2 DELAY IN RECEIVING FUNDS

Some project leads expressed frustration over the amount of time it took between being informed of a successful application and the eventual release of funds. The delays caused particular difficulties for projects looking to deliver event or new infrastructure in time for Christmas 2021. However, all activities were successfully delivered. The extended lead times caused the loss of up to three months of delivery project time with projects given nine months to complete their project spend.

*"And then we waited months to find out what happens next. So again, the motivation was gone and so it has been an uphill battle to keep that motivation".*

Stakeholders reported the funding delays had a detrimental impact upon initial levels of motivation and momentum amongst project teams whilst placing large pressures upon delivery timescales.

Some of these delays were owing to the accounting, logistics, contractual administration, and due diligence procedures required for a new programme. The open nature of applications reduced opportunities to collect the information needed for Sheffield City Council (SCC) to complete these processes. Limited capacity within SCC was cited as another contributing factor, with staff tasked with completing this work whilst also working across other workstreams.

## 5.3 DISTRICT DELIVERY CAPACITY

Five of the fifteen projects, Hillsborough, Walkley, the Cultural Industries Quarter, Spital Hill and Page Hall appointed a formal project manager to oversee delivery. This was to strengthen their project management capability and increase capacity. Increased capacity was particularly important in the case of Hillsborough, Walkley and Site Gallery which were larger projects with a complex combination of event and infrastructure outputs to deliver. Smaller projects Spital Hill and Page Hall appointed project managers to fill gaps in skills, experience and capacity amongst the project teams overseeing delivery. Other projects were delivered by volunteers either working as part of, or in conjunction with, a constituted body. Projects managed and delivered by volunteers often had more support from the BIODs, such as Topley Rise, Nether Edge, Chapelton and Broomhill.

*"The Business Information Officers have played a large role in making ERF a success"*

The role of the constituted bodies was also very important. Not only did they provide the formal structures upon which applications could be processed they often provided additional experience, expertise, resource, and community understanding to support project delivery. Community and voluntary organisations and non-profit organisations were often used. Zest ran the Walkley project, Manor & Castle Development Trust the Manor Park project and Norfolk Park Tenants and Residents Association supported the Woodhouse project.



Several stakeholders expressed concerns over the reliance on volunteers to oversee delivery which could prove to be unsustainable due to the time required create a business community, complete the application, source/create a partner constituted body, and run and manage project delivery. Clearly, however, one of the key successes of the ERF programme has been the creation of improved delivery capacity within the district centres. With eight new business forums created and the successful engagement of several community & voluntary organisations and local councillors, there is a clear foundation and model for further ERF delivery.

*"Building capacity in the local communities is key, Round 1 of ERF has clearly shown that this is the critical success factor for most projects."*

## 5.4 COMMUNITY DELIVERY

As of September 2022, all projects are currently on track to deliver their outputs. This is an impressive achievement considering that ERF is a new funding programme with a novel delivery approach/model and districts starting from a blank page. Nine projects completely on track with no issues and five are largely on track but with some issues. The few projects which are behind will deliver their interventions by the end of the programme.

### DELIVERY OVERVIEW

The physical improvements across the district centres from benches to banners demonstrate how small place-based interventions can impact a local area by creating spaces for people to enjoy and celebrate their high street. Importantly, these improvements to the public sphere create a tangible legacy which will last beyond the ERF.

Across the projects, community events were well received with significant increases in footfall on the days of the events reported and positive responses from the local communities. Woodhouse, Manor



Park and Chapeltown have shown the positive impact of these events can be spread across the year if multiple events are scheduled (often in conjunction with seasonal events). Walkley and the Creative Industries Quarter demonstrate the window of good weather during the summer can be exploited to put on multiple events during this period. The upcoming Christmas period will also be utilised with numerous further community switch on events planned.

Where events were delivered in conjunction with improvements to the public sphere, there is the potential for a longer lasting two-fold legacy with stakeholders welcoming tangible improvements to their local district centres alongside the feel-good factor that comes from community events. The Angel Street Kinema project highlight how alternative approaches and outputs can continue to enhance the ERF.

Summaries of each project delivery follow below.

#### CHAPELTOWN

This project has seen the successful delivery of a jubilee event and a Chapeltown Fair. Christmas lights were also installed in 2021 with a switch on event, and the same is planned for Christmas 2022. A Chapeltown trail has been created and marketed across the area to support increased footfall across the district. Banner brackets and banners have been installed across Chapeltown to promote the district centre with additional banners installed at Chapeltown Railway Station. A new bench order has been agreed with installation due before Christmas.

The project team has been led by a local retailer and a parish councillor who have a clear passionate commitment to local district improvement. They reported that these events and improvements have been well received by the local community who appreciated the chance to spend quality leisure time within their local area. Consultation and communication efforts are continuing to ensure a wide range of ongoing business community input with each of the project team delegated a set of businesses to speak to.

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## FIRTH PARK

Banners have been installed with jubilee bunting also put-up across the main roundabout during June. A jubilee/ funday event was successfully held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July with an associated shop window competition. A very well received and quickly delivered park safety improvement scheme was also implemented with large amounts of vegetation cleared to improve sightline into the park. Public feedback suggests this has made local residents feel safer within the area.

Work is currently being undertaken to launch a Firth Park business forum with a public art programme and street furniture installation programme planned in the coming months. A wide variety of local community organisations have been engaged in the decision making and delivery with further assistance provided by local councillors. The project lead commented that he was very thankful for the support and experience his fellow steering group members provided and the role they took in communicating many decisions to the local community.

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## MANOR PARK

This project has been led by a local community champion with a strong track record of delivering interventions for this community. Through their work Christmas lights infrastructure has been installed with a switch on event planned for December 2022. A Heart of the Manor Facebook group has been successfully launched with good engagement rates reported by the project team. Regular meetings with local shop owners have been held with monthly updates provided. Further engagement of new residents is planned for the Autumn. A community event took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August with local makers providing several stalls. A further bonfire event planned for November. Gazebos and market stalls have been purchased to provide ongoing community assets for future events. A local mural artist has been selected and is working with local schools and residents to plan the upcoming public art installation. The project lead is also planning further community events utilising the new market infrastructure to run future fundraising event and continuing to the positive community spirit engendered by the first events.

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## WALKLEY

Two community events were delivered in June and July, a Jubilee celebration and the Walkley festival. A parklet has been created and new cycling storage infrastructure installed. A shopfront improvement scheme, a shutter art programme and an arts trail are all planned for Autumn 2022. This programme was aimed at primarily supporting traders on South Road through increasing local footfall.

The local Business Action Group and local councillors were heavily involved in the application process, but the delivery process was commissioned to a local CVO, Zest Community. This combination of stakeholders provides a balance of local knowledge, business representation and delivery capacity that project leads believe will continue to benefit the area.

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## SPITAL HILL

This project experienced some initial delivery delay with contracts signed in Spring 2022. The original community event and street art activities planned were initially postponed but one event has since been delivered, with two more planned and discussions underway with a local street artist in relation to the murals. The project has successfully established a new business forum and a banner installation programme has been planned with an order submitted. Following ongoing delivery issues, a new project plan was put in place, with a Business Information Officer providing support, and the team are on track to successfully deliver their interventions by the end of the programme.



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## TOTLEY RISE

A bin and banner installation programme has been delivered. Following discussions with Amey the original plan for a hanging basket installation programme will now not go ahead. The application and delivery process have been overseen by a local shop owner in conjunction with the Business Information Officer.

The input of several other local retailers was successfully sought during the application process with hopes that this dialogue could evolve in future into a formal retailer's association.

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## MOSBOROUGH

A consultation process was undertaken with the local retail businesses, and they indicated that they wanted to see some alterations made to the parking on the high street with shorter- and longer-term parking bays installed. The pre planning process has been completed and the highway improvements have been priced. Following this consultation period installation is planned for Autumn 2022.

A decision was also taken to install permanent Christmas lights infrastructure on the high street and to purchase lights as a permanent community asset that could be used every year. They were installed for Christmas 2021 with the project lead describing the feedback from local residents as "phenomenal". A local business owner has now also installed brackets for Christmas trees which will be lit as part of the Christmas lights. The project team are now looking to further involve the Local Area Committee and other local stakeholders in a process that they believe has been a really positive development for local business which they describe as the "lifeblood of the community".

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## WOODHOUSE

A local community hub put together the applications and oversaw the delivery process. They focused upon resurrecting the local market for the first time in over thirty years, with a series of successful market days already held. A permanent Christmas tree has been installed on the Market Square's Memorial Garden with Christmas light infrastructure. A local marketing and communication campaign has been undertaken and market stall infrastructure purchased. Further market events are planned throughout Autumn and up to Christmas 2022, including a Christmas lights switch on event. Good relations have been formed with the local community forum with clear synergy developing with the project team. The market events have received some very positive feedback from both local



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residents and other retailers with regular references made to the reclamation of this public space for the community. Residents have reported feeling safer on market days and reassured by the presence of much larger groups of the local community. One resident referred to it being the first time that he had spent significant social time in the marketplace in decades. The project lead now hopes that this foundation can be built upon with further work with the wider business community and a resident's association.

#### NETHER EDGE

Banner brackets have been installed with the banners due to be put up in Autumn 2022. A planter installation programme has taken place with a new notice board due to be installed (to be maintained by a local community group). A tree installation programme has begun with species and locations agreed.

A community event is being planned for later in the year with a focus upon bringing in a wider demographic/customer base to the area. The original project team experienced some turnover midway through the process as it became clear that their proposals were not within scope. A new project lead was found from a local business community with support from a local charity and the reshaped proposals are on track for delivery. The project lead sees these improvements as permanent assets that will continue to benefit the local area.



#### ABBEYDALE ROAD TREES



This programme was overseen and delivered by a newly formed community organisation, Abbeydale Street Trees. It has already been delivered with the parklet installed and a launch event held. An ongoing maintenance programme is currently being formulated. The project team welcomed the support provided by the SCC. They credited it with assisting with the smooth and efficient completion of the project. They stated that the feedback received at the launch event was positive and have had numerous supportive comments since. They were particularly heartened by the support offered by local businesses who are now supporting with ongoing maintenance and plant watering.

#### HILLSBOROUGH

Christmas lights infrastructure was installed in time for December 2021 with a switch on event and associated shop window competition successfully held.

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A street furniture infrastructure installation programme has taken place with new benches, seats, bins, and cycle stands. A shopfront improvement scheme has started with a successful trial of four shops. A street art/shutter front installation programme and a community event are planned for Autumn 2022. A Christmas lights event will also take place in December. Project leadership has been provided by a local business owner who has worked very closely with the Business Information Officer on local business engagement and delivery. She is a long-term resident and business owner who got involved because of her passion for the area and her desire to see collective effort to support local retail.



Other local business owners were very positive about the effect the outputs were having upon the local area particularly in terms of the improvements to the shopfronts and street infrastructure. They welcomed the efforts that had been made to make the area feel cleaner, more welcoming and more conducive to socialising. The project team are now looking for ways to maintain the momentum and motivation in the future by securing further funds.

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#### ANGEL STREET KINEMA

A first cohort of local creative workers has been recruited with Kinema providing incubation and training support and some paid creative work. This first five include an animator, an illustrator, a sound designer, a motion graphics specialist, and a writer/editor. Various community events have been hosted including the DocFest opening party and a photographic exhibition has been held in mid-July 2022. An online creative platform is currently being developed to support local creatives and artists. The project lead was very positive about the impact of the project stating that it would not have happened without ERF support. They are now looking to scale up their work with a second cohort of creatives to support the launch of the digital platform that they believe will provide an excellent asset and support network for Sheffield's creative community.

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#### PAGE HALL

A new business forum has been established and activities are being planned to include, a street furniture installation programme and a Keep Page Hall Tidy campaign, with further meetings planned for early October. The team are on track to deliver all outputs by the end of the programme.

This project experienced some initial delivery delay with contracts signed in Spring 2022. As in the case of Spital Hill, this was partly reflective of the time and resource required to establish understanding, engagement, and consensus within a district with a range of different demographics, needs and priorities.

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## BROOMHILL

The banner and planter installation programme has been completed. The shop front renovation programme is ongoing with 30 shops either in progress or completed. Another 15 will be completed by the end of the year. The 'It's all about Broomhill' marketing campaign has been launched. The green wall installation has recently received planning permission. Planning permission for the mural has yet to be submitted.

The delivery process has been driven by two long established local business owners with a clear passion for supporting local area improvements to support local retail. They also hope that this process has created a clear foundation upon which further improvements can be delivered and the local traders association can expand and develop.



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## THE CULTURAL INDUSTRIES QUARTER (SITE GALLERY)



Four successful weekend interactive events have been held across the Cultural Industries Quarter: Moving Image in early July 2022; Young People in late July; Street & Public Art in early August; and Sustainability in early September.

A banner installation and street art installation programmes across four sites have all been delivered with the involvement of over 100 local artists. Project delivery was managed by a commissioned freelance event's organiser.

A steering group made up of a variety of local creative organisations (including Site Gallery and Yorkshire Artspace) led the tendering process with a focus upon bringing atmosphere and footfall back to the CIQ post lockdown. This cultural partnership hope to build upon the improved local perception of this central public space (during events) continuing to use similar creative events programmes and public sphere improvements to support increases in local footfall.

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## 5.5 GOVERNANCE, ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

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### LOCALLY-LED DELIVERY

Stakeholders were unanimous in their support for the project's objective to encourage district autonomy and agency over funding choices and to empower locally led delivery. They welcomed the opportunity to make decisions on how to support their local high streets.

*"The community ownership model got people motivated and excited."*

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### PROCUREMENT

Different approaches were taken by project teams over procurement processes. Some used existing council processes for the procurement and delivery for outputs such as street furniture whereas others



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wanted to use their own processes. This caused tensions between some project leads' desire for creative and procurement agency, the project's overall aim for local autonomy and SCC's contractual obligations. It also caused some inconsistencies with project delivery timescales, with differing attitudes as to whether delivery time or thorough due process should be prioritised.

Several project leads reported they had been able to procure services at a lower price than those quoted by the Council's third-party operators. Some also reported frustration when the original price quoted by these operators were significantly increased as they moved into the new financial year. These issues caused frustration as contractual obligations meant that they had no choice but to use SCC's outsourced delivery partners often at, what they saw as, a greater price and longer timeframe.

*"We sourced and costed everything and passed it over to the Council. Surely if we've costed done this and we're under budget we shouldn't then be in a position where we were £20,000 over budget"*

*"The biggest challenge/criticism of ERF is spending money with outsourced delivery partners. It's money spent out of Sheffield, we've no control of quality, can't use environmental options, or employ local people."*

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#### WORKING WITH SCC

Some project teams explained information regarding Council protocols was not always easily available and they experienced significant delays as they tried to navigate a system that they had very limited experience of. Three leads found the initial communication with SCC frustrating often speaking to multiple individuals who were not necessarily communicating with each other. Similarly, there were also challenges in navigating the procurement processes for some project teams. The challenges were often addressed by having a central contact in SCC to drive the processes forward.

*"Delivery application was helped by have a facilitator who could knock heads together"*

Notably, those who experienced difficulties were very positive about the efforts made by members of the project management team to support them, welcoming their efforts to resolve difficulties and delays. Project leads welcomed the determined, open, and responsive approach the ERF project manager took to navigating Council systems, procedures and protocols and supporting output delivery.

*"None of us believe in top-down management, we need grass roots delivery and buy in. If you just dictate, there is no possibility of a legacy."*

Some concerns were raised about the level of bureaucracy required for the project, with large amounts of project management time devoted to accounting procedures that stakeholders felt were over prescriptive and rigid. This was a particular issue for projects that had limited book-keeping skills and expertise, or where they relied upon volunteers with reduced time. One stakeholder believed that this could prove to be a disincentive for community groups to become involved in future.

Members of the steering group welcomed the consensus approach to decision making and the collaborative inclusive cross-party working it engendered. They also welcomed the involvement of private sector representatives as it brought a wider perspective to decision making.

*"We were all committed to having inclusivity and cross party working on the committee. We never had to go to a vote everything was done by consensus."*

SCC's flexible approach and support to the project length was also welcomed by many stakeholders. The decision to offer some projects an extended timescale of up to three months was particularly

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welcomed by stakeholders who experienced a longer delivery lead time and those that still have some seasonally determined outputs to deliver.

Stakeholders were very appreciative of the support offered throughout by the ERF project lead, in particular the efforts they made to help navigate Council systems, protocols and procedures and the pro-active, supportive and determined approach they took to helping project leads with difficulties.

*"It has been really helpful having a person within the Council who you can easily contact and run things by."*

*"The Project Manager had a real can-do attitude, she's been great"*

Several project leads reported that they found the monthly meeting with the management team helpful in that it provided an opportunity to report delivery progress and peer support, help to resolve issues and gain further guidance and support. Yet, questions were raised as to whether individuals had sufficient capacity to continue this level of support under potential future iterations of ERF.

The general makeup of the steering group was seen as a positive with council officers, councillors from three different parties, the Chamber of Commerce and the private sector all on the committee. Stakeholders commented the steering group had good gender diversity. However, it was felt by some that the steering group was not diverse in terms of ethnicity or lived experiences and consequently were not representative of the different voices of communities across Sheffield.

## 5.6 SCC CAPACITY

Implementing administration and facilitation processes for a new programme placed significant resource demands on the SCC ERF project manager and supporting staff. Stakeholders were very positive about the work undertaken by this team and the diligent and hardworking role they played in supporting delivery. However, questions were raised as to whether there was enough capacity within this team to deliver and manage the application process, establish new and complex bureaucratic structures and oversee and facilitate the delivery of fifteen projects. Especially when projects lacked the skills, experience and business community network required to apply for and manage projects easily.

The role BIOs played in supporting applications, consensus building, and delivery was frequently praised, and some applications and projects would not have succeeded without their help. However, questions were raised as to whether they always had the capacity to support the process in the context of their other responsibilities. Increasing the number of BIOs or reducing the scope of the role would enable more in-depth support to be given to more individual projects.

## 6. BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

This chapter evaluates ERF's impact in terms of community empowerment and collaboration.

The project has illustrated the power of locally led and delivered interventions to encourage and support community consensus. Specifically, the ERF has seen the creation of eight business forums and strengthened existing networks. The importance of local consensus and collaboration is highlighted by the areas where this is missing and subsequently struggled to meaningfully engage with the ERF.

### 6.1 LOCAL BUSINESS FORUMS/ORGANISATIONS

New information on where business and community networks are operating was an unexpected positive outcome for SCC.

In areas such as Walkley, the Cultural Industries Quarter and Broomhill, where an existing forum/organisation existed, stakeholders reported that the ERF had an empowering effect with these groups welcoming the autonomy and funding. The Angel Street project lead, Kollider, were also very positive about how the funding had allowed them to take a leading role in support local creative professionals/businesses.



Six areas, Woodhouse, Spital Hill, Hillsborough, Chapelton, Firth Park and Manor Park, highlighted the influence that ERF had in stimulating support for a new business forum/organisation.



ERF has supported the creation of Choose Chapelton with efforts made by the BIOs and project leads/teams to provide one forum that represents the whole spectrum of high street businesses in the district. Following the successful delivery of ERF in Firth Park the project team are establishing a legacy via the creation of a business forum. In Manor Park project leads hope the creation of the Heart of Manor group will be the first step towards a formal local business group. In Woodhouse, the project lead is currently in discussion with other businesses/local forums that

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were involved in the ERF process to create something similar. In Hillsborough, the project lead is in the early stages of setting up a new 'Hillsborough Together' forum.

In the above examples project leads, and BIOs, have reported that this was not always an easy process. In several cases, the BIOs and a small number of business owners have taken responsibility for seeking wider business input and collaboration with limited success. Other business owners have regularly cited the current economic climate and day-to-day operational/logistical pressures as reasons for not becoming involved.

BIOs also reported that in the case of many failed, and even in the case of some successful applications, it was difficult to achieve a genuine business community consensus regarding need and appropriate deliverables. This situation was often exacerbated by limited, or no, business community networks within certain areas.

Community building has been one of the most welcomed (even if unintended) impacts of the funding, generating clear social value. As one project lead explained:

*"Our event obviously has a primary economic function, but it's over time, whether it's the Woodhouse by the Sea, Remembrance Day or the Jubilee, it's actually performing a social function as part of that. That's why we have an events calendar because these things are important to people."*

## 6.2 DIFFICULTIES BUILDING COMMUNITY CONSENSUS

*"In a couple of places where, you know, either that sense of community wasn't quite there, or there was one place where there was two rival factions. And because they just couldn't work together, they ended up with nothing"*

In areas where long-established community forums have strong links to the other local organisations and businesses, creating well organised and experienced steering groups was relatively easy. This was seen in areas like Firth Park and Nether Edge. In areas, such as Hackenthorpe, where no such group existed, it proved very difficult within the timescale to establish any kind of foundation on which a consensus application could be established. In other cases, such as Sharrow Vale, where consensus could not be established, competing applications were submitted from the same area.

Some businesses expressed frustration that the community forum/organisation leading on the application and delivery were not always fully representative of the local businesses. The feedback from these businesses focused on consultation and communication efforts that they believed were insufficient.



Other stakeholders pointed out the difficulties in differentiating between community interest and business interest. With the ERF focused upon business recovery there was concern that the makeup of project leads/teams did not always reflect this focus. Yet, it was widely acknowledged that the business communities did not always have the skills, experience, capacity, or willingness to lead on application

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and delivery. A situation compounded by the fact that the strength of the project management team was a key criterion in the scoring process. In many cases, this situation could only be resolved by drawing upon the skills and experience of other non-retail community groups.

### 6.3 CONSENSUS BUILDING

Several stakeholders pointed out that despite some of these difficulties, the ERF programme had empowered pre-existing local community/business groups and catalysed the creation of groups where they did not exist. Moreover, it has improved SCC understanding of areas where they did not exist.

In areas such as Hillsborough and Chapeltown, the BIODs played a significant role in establishing some form of consensus between geographically spread business communities that had not necessarily worked collaboratively in the past. The eventual successful creation of a Spital Hill business forum also provides a template that will inform future work.

Most stakeholders welcomed ERF's focus upon local autonomy over decision making with some calling for the further involvement of the Business Information Officers to help ensure these decisions continue to fully reflect as many local business interests/opinions as possible.

BIODs expressed optimism that given a longer timescale, further business community groups/organisations could be established across the city with their relationships and contacts providing a strong foundation upon which consensus could be built.



### 6.4 MEDIA IMPACT

The ERF has garnered significant levels of positive media coverage in terms of the individual projects and the fund as a whole. Headlines included '*Sheffield Chamber hails "game-changing" funding scheme*' and '*£2m fund to bring the buzz back to Sheffield streets*'. There were also numerous articles showcasing the events across the districts as well as positive radio coverage. Importantly, this coverage positively impacts the image and awareness of district centres.

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## 7. CONCLUSION AND THE FUTURE OF ERF

This chapter considers the strengths of the ERF and areas of future development. It also evaluates the potential legacy of the fund looking and how it may evolve in future.

Round 1 of ERF has been a success with all fifteen projects on track to deliver and 56 outputs delivered so far. Eight new business forums have been established and district centres across Sheffield visibly improved. Stakeholders and partners are very positive about the immediate and legacy impact it made. Round 1 of the ERF has proved this collaborative locally led model is a fruitful one and there is a clear appetite for a second round.

The lessons from understandable challenges and teething problems can ensure it is more successful.

### 7.1 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The ERF programme had notable successes in terms of meeting the original strategic objectives. Fifteen projects were launched across the city, with all on track to deliver clear outputs in a short timescale with minimal levels of project overspend. Across the city a wider range of outputs have been delivered to date including fifteen community events, six street furniture improvement programmes and two major shopfront improvement schemes. The programme has facilitated consensus and collaborative place-based working within district centres, supporting, strengthening, and even creating many community partnerships through a unique and innovative model. Eight new business forums have been established with existing groups significantly empowered by ERF funding.

There is a clear sense that some local economic recovery will be supported by the outputs achieved. Yet, stakeholders acknowledged the uncertainty over the direct impact of the ERF on protecting jobs and businesses and generating local demand, which is much harder to ascertain for a programme of this scale and nature. Nevertheless, stakeholders clearly articulated the wider, and somewhat unexpected, social impacts of the interventions and believed the future strategic objectives should capture this.

### 7.2 RETAIL BUSINESS REPRESENTATION, DELIVERY, AND AUTONOMY

A clear outcome of the programme has been an improved picture of the representative networks across the city, an enhanced understanding of business need within the districts and the further establishment of foundations upon which further work can be built. Large gaps do still exist within many parts of the city, a vacuum that cannot always be filled by other community organisations without further questions being posed over its representativeness of retail business interests.

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There is also a danger that the parts of the city most in need of support and funds could miss out on opportunities because of limited skills, experience and capacity and a lack of local business champions. Through the ERF questions have been raised over the realistic expectations for relatively inexperienced project leads/teams, particularly in cases where they operate solely on a voluntary basis and/or with a small team. That said the successful creation of a business forum within Spital Hill has shown what can be achieved with the deployment of targeted support.

ERF's focus upon district autonomy was overwhelmingly welcomed by local stakeholders but questions have been raised as to whether this has the potential to be curtailed by the need to ensure delivery is always within SCC procedures, protocols, and their contractual obligations to third party delivery providers. Those stakeholders who experienced difficulties regarding what was within scope called for clarity over achievable deliverables much earlier within the process.

There were differences within delivery timescales with some projects prioritising swift delivery often to meet seasonal deadlines for their outputs (i.e. Christmas lights) and other projects, who were conscious of the need for a clear audit trail, prioritising more formal procurement processes.

### 7.3 IMPACT AND LEGACY

ERF has provided a wealth of experience and examples that could inform future iterations of the programme. As Section 6 highlights, ERF has delivered a large spectrum of outputs and deliverables across 15 different district centres. Local business feedback was generally positive with many stakeholders welcoming SCC's attempts to support them and provide autonomy over decision making. The overwhelming consensus from project leads was that they would like to see this approach continue in future with further delegation of decisions down to a local level.

In terms of ongoing legacy there is now a question over to what extent ERF's deliverables/outputs will continue to support long-term business recovery within a very challenging wider economic context. Many project leads expressed concerns with regards to what will happen to key elements of their projects once the funding comes to an end. Concerns were expressed that the impetus, understanding and expertise created by ERF programme would be lost once funding came to an end. Within this context it was clear that they would very much welcome the opportunity to bid for future ERF funds.

Whilst ERF did undoubtedly catalyse and support the creation of increased levels of retail business community collaboration, the stakeholder consensus was that the continued development, spread and survival of these groups would require significant ongoing support and impetus. Some also expressed a concern that continued effort would be required to ensure local ERF delivery did not become dominated by other community interests and is genuinely representative of the entirety of local retail businesses.

However, with a net social return of between £1.99 and £2.24 per £1 spent the social value impact of ERF is clear. A wide variety of tangible impacts were fostered that will continue to benefit the local district centres for years to come. These include physical infrastructure and event support infrastructure. Other less tangible impacts have also been fostered that will have a continued beneficial impact upon the areas in receipt of funds. In cases such as Woodhouse, the Cultural Industries Quarter, Chapeltown and Manor Park, stakeholder feedback has clearly indicated that ERF funding has helped to improve perceptions of local public spaces. It is therefore hoped that these improved perceptions of safety and community will create a legacy of increased footfall, dwell time and public spend in district centre.

*"One of the good bits of ERF has been seeing it through to the end and then seeing kids playing in the park"*

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It is also clear from feedback that ERF has convinced many stakeholders that the council really care about their district centres and that they want to fully involve the local community within decisions on how best to improve them.

*"Some projects have immediate outcomes such as a festival but there is a twofold nature to the outcomes. The grant is delivered and then there is the legacy of community engaging with council like never before. The Council should get the kudos it deserves for that. "*

## 7.4 FUTURE OF ERF

All the stakeholders agreed there is a real appetite for future iterations of ERF. Almost without exception they reported that it had provided an obvious boost to district centres across the city with significant amounts of positive feedback received from local businesses, residents, and community representatives.

The level of local autonomy and agency over decision making and procurement was strongly welcomed by a wide range of stakeholders, with a strong appetite to see this replicated in future programmes. There is also a desire to see the scope for creative solutions to business recovery retained, with the application process still allowing for flexibility.

A potential next round of ERF will be significantly boosted by the improved and empowered business community networks in many areas of the city. The original limited, and in some cases misdirected, set of applications, highlighted limited retail business representative forums/groups in many areas of the city. The effective actions of the steering group to broaden the range and improve the standard/appropriateness of the final applications shows that these groups could continue to be deployed to support any future application process.

Round One of ERF has also provided a wealth of examples, models and outputs that could be used to inform future iterations of the fund, providing prospective applicants with models of best practice and a series of different organisational and delivery models and outputs to select from. It has also clearly highlighted the importance of a series of ERF champions across all levels of the programme.



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## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This Chapter details recommendations Sheffield City Council may wish to consider.

### 8.1 STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Lengthen the timescales for each stage of the ERF from the application stages to delivery to increase the opportunities for success.

**Recommendation 2:** Improve the monitoring of ERF funded projects for example with bi-monthly progress forms which have been co-designed with the delivery team and providing support through Business Information Officers were required.

**Recommendation 3:** Establish data collection procedures for ERF funded events to improve understanding of the quantitative impacts of interventions.

**Recommendation 4:** Agree tailored milestones with each successful application before project inception to ensure projects are delivered in a timely manner and identify where targeted support may be required.

**Recommendation 5:** Create a guide for potential applicants, using the examples and lessons from the ERF Round 1, to improve clarity and understanding of the requirements, scope, and processes of ERF during the application process. This could inform a 'self-assessment' for applications and highlight areas of support.

**Recommendation 6:** Consider options to make the application process more inclusive and accessible for example creating a 'pitch stage' or visits to potential locations.

**Recommendation 7:** Continue the successful iterative and flexible approach to the application process which accommodates a variety of applicants, experiences, and expertise.

**Recommendation 8:** Improve the efficiency contract stage by increasing the information collected within applications surrounding due diligence processes.

**Recommendation 9:** Establish a cut-off date for applications to allow more time for a consistently rigorous scoring process.

**Recommendation 10:** Increase the diversity of the Steering Group to be more reflective of the communities across the ERF supports across Sheffield.

**Recommendation 11:** Align the ERF activity and wider Sheffield City Council plans and priorities. For example, further developing the ERF objectives to reflect the clear social value benefits created during ERF Round 1.

**Recommendation 12:** Explore longer-term options to integrate business voices into the Local Area Committees and promote opportunities for collaboration between the committees and local business groups.

### 8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DELIVERY

**Recommendation 13:** Ensure project steering groups are equipped with appropriate administrative experience and time to oversee the local ERF delivery.

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**Recommendation 14:** Establish clear project management criteria which potential project managers can be assessed against to understand their suitability and support needs.

**Recommendation 15:** Continue to promote the use of paying for project management time.

**Recommendation 16:** Create a project managers support network where people can connect, mentor one another, update on projects, and share best practice.

**Recommendation 17:** Share lessons and best practice from the ERF Round 1 through a workshop with new project leads during the early stages of ERF Round 2.

### 8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING CONDITIONS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS – CAPACITY, COMMUNITIES AND LEGACY

**Recommendation 18:** Provide more capacity to delivery staff supporting the ERF, including Sheffield City Council staff and the Business Information Officers, so that they can continue to support and facilitate the ERF.

**Recommendation 19:** Explore the potential for a separate dedicated fund to support potential applicants with a lack of capacity to apply normally. This can ensure the ERF is accessible to all communities of Sheffield.

**Recommendation 20:** Continue working with applicants to understand local capacity and skills challenges and provide extra support to those who need it. For example, pairing potential applicants with a local project manager or voluntary or community organisation.

**Recommendation 21:** Continue to support the project teams and business forums created in ERF Round 1 to help maintain its legacy.

**Recommendation 22:** Create the conditions for sustainable business networks at a local level. For example, by using existing community networks to catalyse collaboration.

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## APPENDIX ONE – STEERING GROUP AND PROJECT TEAM

The ERF Steering Group is made up of the following members:

- Councillor Martin Smith (Liberal Democrats) - Chair
- Councillor Ben Miskell (Labour)
- Councillor Paul Turpin (Green Party)
- Diana Buckley (Director of Economic Development, Skills, and Culture -SCC)
- Ben Morley (Head of Strategic Development and External Funding – SCC)
- Nik Hamilton (Acting Head of Communities – SCC)
- Louisa Harrison-Walker (Chief Executive, Sheffield Chamber of Commerce)
- Emma Marshall (Non Executive Director, Sheffield Chamber of Commerce)

The following officers also attend providing day to day operational leadership and support:

- Carly Stafford (Programmes and Accountable Body Team)
- Sarah Lowi Jones (Economic Policy Officer)

Sarah Lowi Jones acted as the Project Manager and Secretariat for ERF.

## APPENDIX TWO - LIST OF CONSULTEES

Sarah Lowi Jones	ERF Project Manager
Esther Morrison	Business Information Officer
Roger Smith	Business Information Officer
Alan Ball	Business Information Officer
Danny Wilkinson	Business Information Officer
Sally Pepper	Business Information Officer
Simon Walton	Business Information Officer
Cllr Paul Turpin	ERF Steering Group Member
Emma Marshall	ERF Steering Group Member
Cllr Martin Smith	Chair Economic Development and Skills Policy
Cllr John Housley	Project Lead – Chapeltown
Lisa Birkett	Project Lead – Chapeltown
Chris Fox	Project Lead – Firth Park
Cllr Dawn Dale	Project Lead – Manor Park
Richard Botham	Project Lead – Woodhouse
Cllr Tony Dowling	Project Lead – Mosborough
Steve Ojari	Project Lead – Nether Edge
Luke Rose	Project Lead – Abbeydale Street Trees
Janine Lawson	Project Lead – Hillsborough
Matt Dean	Project Lead – Walkley
Sarah Worth	Project Lead – Broomhill
Adrian Hackett	Project Lead – Angel Street Kinema
Judith Harry	Project Lead – Cultural Industries Quarter
David McLeavy	Project Lead – Cultural Industries Quarter

## APPENDIX THREE – LIST OF APPLICANTS

The following applications were successful/unsuccessful for smaller project funding:

Unsuccessful Applicants	Successful Applicants
City Grab – The Moor Market	Angel Street Kinema
Chef Chef	Abbeydale Road – Street Trees
Middlewood Road	Chapelton
Victoria Quays	Manor Park
Key Worker Ticket Fund	Mosborough
Sharrow Vale West	Page Hall
Culture Lives Here	Totley Rise
Concerteenies	Woodhouse
Sheffield Blitz Memorial Trust	

The following applications were successful/unsuccessful for larger project funding:

Unsuccessful Applicants	Successful Applicants
Blend and Twinkl	Hillsborough Regeneration Project
Walkley to Crookes Valley Park	Walkley
Mowbray Gardens	Broomhill
Kommune	Cultural Industries Quarter – Site Gallery
SSEN Markets	Nether Edge
Makers Markets Pals	Friends of Firth Park
Moor Market	Spital Hill
Fitzallan Square	
Sheffield Cathedral	
Richmond	
UNIGHT	
Hillsborough Shuttle Bus	
University Green Festival	
Handsworth	
Outdoor Theatre	
Festival of Sheffield	
Hospitality Advisor Bar Craft	
Crookes	
Fact Totem	
Now Then Magazine	
TRAXX Market Chapelton	
Gaard Coffee Kelham	
Sharrow Vale Road	
Hope Walks	
Chapelton	
Frechville	
Hackenthorpe	

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