



Squash, Liverpool



Location
Liverpool



Founded
2007 Squash building
opened 2018



Legal structure
Company Limited
by Guarantee



Description of activity
Cooking and horticulture
training, events, arts
programme, food shop, café
and catering, consultation



Key assets
Community building



Staff and volunteers
Four full time equivalent staff
and 96 to 118 volunteers from
the community

Overview

Squash, is an eco-friendly, community-led food space that opened on 4th May 2018. The space incorporates a new community business – a food shop, café and catering service. The organisation has been in existence as an arts and health organisation since 2007. As the organisation became more established and rooted in the area it was keen to expand but a lack of a building was hindering their community ambition. It needed a large and more suitable space to accommodate its existing cooking sessions and provide a community meeting space. It was important to ensure the meeting space remained embedded in the community. As such, the organisation was very keen for land to be found in the local area, preferably on the local street. A visioning day was held in May 2014 where members of the community, volunteers and the board came together to plan the future. A piece of local, neglected local authority land was identified and eventually purchased with funding raised through Social Investment Business and the Plunkett Foundation. Other funds were raised through crowdfunding, Biffa, Liverpool NHS, Liverpool One Foundation, Tudor Trust, Marks and Spencer Energy Fund, Power to Change/Big Lottery, Howdens Kitchens and Liverpool City Council.

Squash has been a Company Limited by Guarantee for 11 years, run by, for, and with the local community using volunteers and paid staff. It is a creative food enterprise rooted in Liverpool 8 since 2007, grown and lead by a diverse group of local people, committed to participatory social change. With backgrounds in cooking, horticulture, visual arts, film-making, performance and architecture, the organisation is bold, seasonal, passionate and unusual.



The aim of Squash is to bring culture and community together, reclaiming food production via food growing, cooking and culinary craft skills. Activities include a community café and ingredients-based shop, a four-season arts festival (Food for Real) and a 100-year street plan where it explores new ways for the neighbourhood to flourish.

What difference community ownership makes

Being a community hub enables Squash to provide a much needed space where people can come together and have a chat. Staff are trained to listen, and this provides a much-needed comfortable safe space where all the community can come together in a relaxed atmosphere. This approach helps to build community cohesion and addresses issues of isolation for members of the community by *“bringing a community space to the area.”*

Squash is embedded within the community and, being a small organisation, decision-making is relatively swift, enabling Squash to respond quickly to the needs of the community. Opening up the community space enables the local community to hold events in the café or larger community areas. The space has also been used to pilot ideas such as a theatre group providing free sessions. There are free cooking classes and encouragement to get involved in other community activities and the food garden and community growing sessions, *“it’s a way to layer things to help people to get a breadth of experience.”* Squash also runs business support for women, an incubator kitchen, as well as a range of other skills-based courses – *“we feel passionate about these opportunities and using our asset to be able to do that.”*

“Harnessing and bringing together that enterprise – we are a community business interested in nurturing and creating a more fertile ground for more stuff to happen ... it’s about making the whole area a better place to live”.

Financial health

The Squash building has been open to the public since May 2018. Currently its financial health is on an upward trajectory. It has met all its financial projections at the time of writing (nine months after opening). Income is generated from the café and shop, with a small but growing contribution from outside catering. The ethos of the organisation prevents it from receiving certain types of funding but grants have been secured from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the People’s Health Trust. One of the key challenges for Squash is capitalising on the

opportunities the building has created for further income generation. Of concern is the continuing management of the transition process and to ensure growth is managed. Currently the biggest expenditure is staff costs so expansion needs careful consideration because of this.

Three key factors affecting the development and financial health of the organisation:

1. The community, staff and board

A major contribution to the success of the organisation is the staff team, board members and volunteers. Board members are drawn locally, either live or work in the area and bring a range of skills and expertise. This has been particularly important during the transition period, where the organisation has undergone expansion and a slight change of focus. Business and HR skills provided by board members have been particularly important during the transition period, where the organisation has undergone expansion and a slight change of focus. Business and HR skills provided by Board members have been particularly welcome during the transition phase when dealing with a larger staff team. A HR sub-committee has been established to take things forward. Moreover, the scaling up of the organisation has also presented challenges. Running a building is something entirely new to the organisation. It is hoped that the board and staff can address these challenges through seeking support where possible, such as making further use of Community Law Liverpool. The board has a clear focus, having undergone long-term governance development since 2017, and provides a range of checks and balances, while helping to develop the future of the organisation together with the staff team. The rotation of board members is also hoped to bring a range of fresh ideas and skills to enable the organisation to grow in the future.

2. Being financially sustainable

The café and shop have shown considerable promise since opening in May 2018 with the café exceeding financial expectations. Currently open three days per week, the café is well patronised and provides a much needed space for local people to meet and eat. True to its ethos, the café provides two *“pay it forward”* schemes, *“Soup it Forward”* and *“Shop it Forward”*, wherein customers can choose to contribute to free meals and ingredients made available to community members in need.

External catering provides another aspect to the income generation of the organisation. This is beginning to establish a reputation for good food from ethical sources, something



that the organisation hopes to capitalise on and promote more widely across the city. It is hoped that this will make a full contribution to their future income generation.

Expansion is on the horizon with two ideas under consideration: increasing café opening times to four days per week and the growth of the outside catering business. These need careful consideration and management however, due to concerns about financial and staffing implications.

One of the biggest challenges for Squash is trying to generate income to remain sustainable in a disadvantaged area. Its biggest expenditure is staff costs, paying a living wage, and with the planned expansion of services this is likely to rise and needs careful monitoring. Volunteers are essential and provide much needed extra support.

Although it does not want to become grant-reliant some grant funding may be needed until Squash can become self-sustaining. Grants have been secured however, from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for core funding and a two-year grant from the People’s Health Trust.

Squash has always operated a mixed income approach. Capacity for providing consultancy services, commissioned work and the arts programme has increased, as well as the advent of the community food business.

3. Providing a community space

Ensuring the building is at the heart of the community is central to the ethos of the organisation. The community space provides a café and shop, as well as an art space and cinema area. *“It’s theirs”- “it’s like their front room”*. There is also a medium-sized kitchen garden attached to the building where residents can become involved or just sit and enjoy the outside space.

The ability to respond quickly to community suggestions and needs gives the local community opportunities to grow and develop. The area is culturally diverse with high child poverty and the community space is an essential part of the local community, *“it’s a loving and caring area, a place to be accepted.”*

The welcoming environment provides many health benefits in terms of improved mental and physical health, healthy eating linked to the seasonal food and cooking recipe packs on sale in the shop and the healthy menus in the café.

Increasing the use of the building may be another opportunity to generate income. Plans are being developed to promote the building for wider use such as for meeting space, or delivering training but these are in the early stages of discussion.

Future direction

Squash is establishing a good reputation with its small external catering business and its reputation is increasing across the city. It is hoped that this will grow over the next year to become a substantial source of income. Having recently won an award under the *“Best Shop”* category in the BBC Food and Farming awards

has given them a great boost, increasing customer visits when their nomination had been announced. Making the community space available for hire presents another opportunity for increasing the income of the organisation.

Financial information

The following table provides an overview of Squash’s income, expenditure and assets for the year ending 30th June 2018.

Income	£235,713
Expenditure	£235,711
Difference between income and expenditure	£2
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	£2
Annual income from grant or subsidy	Not available
Fixed assets	£455,589
Current assets (Debtors; cash at bank and in hand)	£39,218
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	£34,077
Total	£460,730
Net assets	£2,196

