

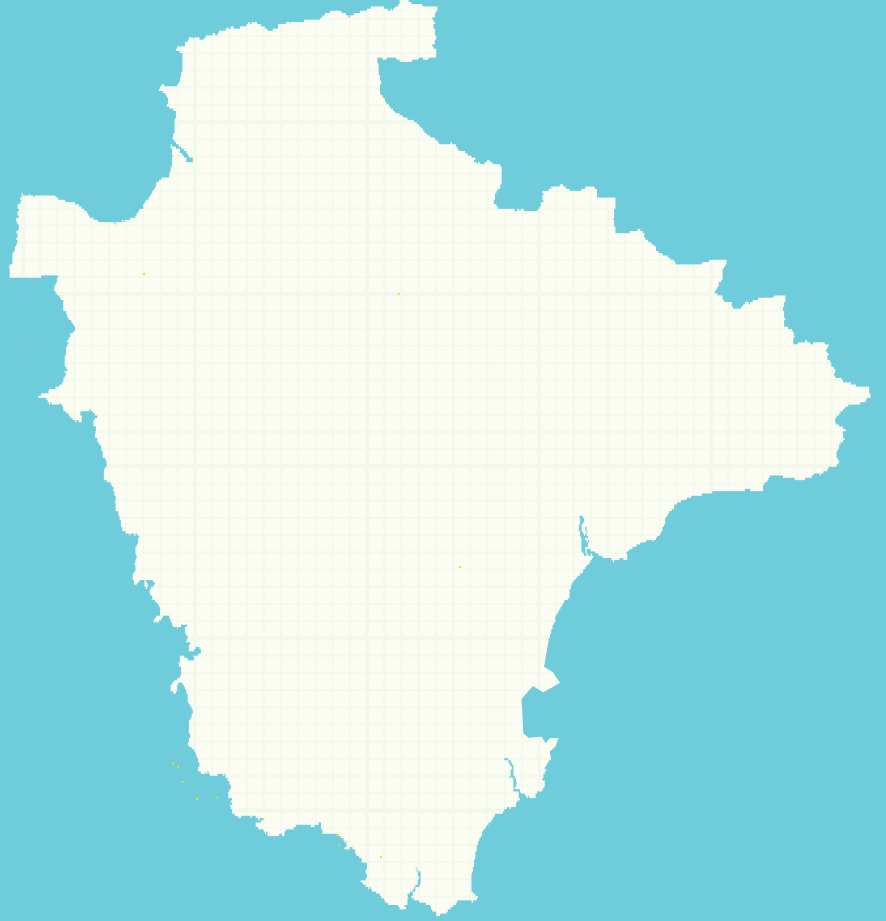


power to
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business in
community
hands



Real Ideas, Plymouth



Catalyst Profile: Real Ideas, Plymouth

A report prepared for Power to Change
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01. Introduction

Empowering Places aims to build more resilient communities by catalysing and nurturing community businesses to provide benefits and opportunities for local people. The programme funds locally rooted ‘catalyst’ organisations in six places across England to help empower communities to develop community businesses:

- [Abram Ward Community Cooperative \(AWCC\) in Abram, Wigan](#)
- [B-Inspired in Braunstone, Leicester](#)
- [Centre4 in Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park, Grimsby](#)
- [Real Ideas in Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth](#)
- [The Wharton Trust in Dyke House, Hartlepool](#)
- [Made in Manningham, incubated by Participate Projects in Manningham, Bradford](#)

The Empowering Places programme is delivered by a consortium of organisations including [Power to Change](#), [Cooperatives UK](#) the lead delivery partner, and with support from expert ‘tech leads’ at the [Centre for Local Economic Strategies \(CLES\)](#) and The [New Economics Foundation \(NEF\)](#). Each catalyst organisation receives up to £1m (between July 2017 and July 2022). The catalysts also have access to a capacity support provider pool, grant funding and money to award seed grants to emerging community businesses in their areas to deliver a five-year plan. This report summarises the interim findings from an independent evaluation of the Empowering Places programme, delivered by a consortium led by Renaisi.

The aim of this evaluation is to enable Power to Change and its stakeholders to learn about how to work in places, and how community businesses can drive local change.

This profile for Plymouth is part of a series of outputs aiming to take a developmental, learning based approach to understanding and improving the programme, and to support wider learning for similar programmes in the future. There is a separate profile for each of the six places in the programme. This profile includes:

- **The socio-economic context of Plymouth drawing on publicly available datasets, and using findings from a hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey commissioned by Power to Change in 2018.**
- **Details of the catalyst organisation Real Ideas, its vision and organisational structure, using information provided in programme documents authored by the catalyst organisations, as well as organisational data registered on the Charity Commission website.**
- **Approaches to delivering the Empowering Places programme taken by Real Ideas, drawing on qualitative data, including interviews with staff at Power to Change, delivery partners, catalyst staff and community businesses – as well as information provided in programme reporting documents authored by the catalyst, delivery partners and Power to Change.¹ Researchers have also taken detailed notes and used an observation and learning log to track relevant findings and develop a comprehensive understanding of the development and impact of the programme.**

As a set, the profiles are designed to allow the exploration of similarities and differences in context and approaches across the Empowering Places areas, and to draw out learning gathered throughout the first three and a half years of delivery.

This profile uses data collected from the beginning of the programme (July 2017) to February 2021. A large portion of the qualitative data was collected in 2020 just as the Covid-19 pandemic was taking hold, and views and experiences may have shifted since then. The profiles will be updated again towards the end of the programme (June 2022), with a view to tracking change.

¹ These include: Power to Change's Learning Paper on Empowering Places, Power to Change's internal quarterly reports, Co-operatives UK reports to Power to Change, notes from community business health checks and diagnostic sessions.

02. Executive Summary: Real Ideas, Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth

In the two former naval areas of Devonport and Stonehouse in Plymouth, Real Ideas is developing a large number of community businesses with a diverse profile. Real Ideas' collaborative approach uses its extensive local connections and local delivery partners to identify potential community business opportunities and to tailor the support it provides its community businesses to their needs. The businesses are at varying stages of development and consequently have experienced different impacts from Covid-19.

This profile explores the context of the Devonport and Stonehouse areas as well as Real Ideas' approach to delivering the Empowering Places programme, the emerging impact of the programme on the catalyst, community businesses and wider community and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Real Ideas and its emerging community businesses.

Key points

- The Plymouth catalyst Real Ideas supports social, community and creative enterprise and develops innovative projects across Plymouth and beyond. It has extensive experience of taking on and redeveloping assets, setting up businesses and running educational programmes and is well networked both locally and nationally.
- Real Ideas is developing and supporting more community businesses than other catalysts in the programme and is taking a differential approach to support, in some cases providing support through the Real Ideas team, in others through local delivery partners who bring different skills and experience to the process.
- At the time of the research Real Ideas had so far used relatively little tailored support for its team or its community businesses. However, this is changing now more of its community businesses are moving into a more developmental stage. The role of the Tech Lead and wider peer support that the programme offers are also highly valued by the Real Ideas team.
- The Empowering Places programme is increasing Real Ideas' capacity to work with community businesses, has shifted the organisation's thinking more towards community business and has helped it develop its already strong local and national relationships.
- There is evidence that Empowering Places has enabled the initiation or development of a range of community businesses in Plymouth and that Real Ideas is giving community groups the necessary tools and frameworks to develop within. The impact on the wider communities was less clear at the time of the research and there are mixed views on the programme's efficacy to date in this respect.
- As a large organisation with a diverse project profile, Real Ideas has experienced significant but comparatively managed impacts from Covid-19 to date. The impacts on its community businesses have been highly variable. Some have not been too affected while others who rely on trading income or were awaiting the outcome of grant funding decisions have been harder hit, often meaning developmental delays, though some have made good use of the time.

03. Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth

Context of area

The Devonport and Stonehouse areas lie to the west of Plymouth, within close reach of the city centre. Devonport and Stonehouse are two of three towns that were amalgamated into modern-day Plymouth. Both areas have connections to Plymouth's naval and maritime history. Devonport has a shipping centre, train station and sports ground. Stonehouse hosts an international ferry port, a yacht-building works and a college.

Plymouth was selected as one of the places within the Empowering Places programme for a variety of reasons. It has an Index of Multiple Deprivation average source rank of 69² and has at least one neighbourhood in the 10% most deprived areas in the country.

Empowering Places catalyst area: Devonport & Stonehouse ³	
Population	15,808
Household income, after housing costs (England average: £27,311)	£19,130
White British (%) England average 79.8%	87%
Under 25 (%) England average 31%	34.7%
65+ (%) England average 18.2%	12.8%
Thriving Places Index (town)⁴	Plymouth
Health Equality (Thriving Places Index, this indicator looks at slope index in life expectancy at birth)	4.14
Mental and Physical Health (Thriving Places Index, this include indicators such as child obesity rate, conceptions in under 18s, illness & disability, prevalence of depression, anxiety and other health indicators)	3.97

² Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015

³ Local Insights (2019)

⁴ Thriving Places Index (2020)

Education and Learning (Thriving Places Index, this includes indicators such as adults with no qualifications, life-long learning, educational attainment of children, childcare quality and school readiness)	5.10
Work and Local Economy (Thriving Places Index, this includes indicators such as income deprivation affecting different sections of the population, employment and percentage with low income)	2.89
Place and Environment (Thriving Places Index, this indicator covers the local environment, housing, transport and safety. This includes green land cover, air pollution, journey times to key services, housing affordability ratio and crime severity index)	5.70
Subjective Happiness (ONS Life Satisfaction Scores)	7.51

Thriving Places Explanation: Scores of between 0 and 10. Scores are coloured to reflect similarity to the England Average, with higher scores indicating that a place is doing better than other places in that domain.	
Key	
Very Low Scores (Below 3.5)	
Below Average Scores (3.5 – 4.5)	
Medium Scores (4.5 – 5.5)	
Above Average Scores (5.5 – 6.5)	
Very High Scores (above 6.5)	

Local Authority area compared with England average ⁵	Plymouth
Housing Affordability	60% – 80%
Community Assets	80% – 100%
Employment rate: Ages 16-64	20% – 40%
Business formation	60% – 80%
Happiness and wellbeing	20% – 40%

Place Analytics Explanation: Each category is benchmarked using multiple measures simultaneously and scored (in percentile form) relative to other catalyst areas. The higher the percentile, the better the place performed.

Percentile Key:	
80 – 100%	Very High
60 – 80%	High
40 – 60%	Above Average
20 – 40%	Average
5 – 20%	Low

⁵ Place Analytics, local authority wide (2019).



UK Social Fabric Index ⁶						
Local Authority	Social Fabric Score	Relationship Score	Physical Infrastructure	Civic Institutions	Economic Value	Positive Social Norms
Plymouth	0.45	0.30	0.53	0.46	0.49	0.47
Hartlepool	0.37	0.24	0.48	0.38	0.44	0.33
North East Lincolnshire	0.38	0.27	0.50	0.38	0.40	0.36
Leicester	0.42	0.21	0.59	0.49	0.36	0.45
Bradford	0.43	0.28	0.58	0.43	0.43	0.43
Wigan	0.46	0.33	0.57	0.45	0.53	0.45

UK Social Fabric Index Explanation:

Scores are graded from zero to one, with a score of one indicating the best-case scenario.

1. Social Fabric Score: This is a score for the strength of social fabric across all five threads; relationship, physical infrastructure, civic institutions, economic value and positive social norms
2. Relationship Score: This looks at clusters of social groups of people in communities and community-owned assets
3. Physical Infrastructure: This looks at physical assets that are present in communities which facilitate, structure and organise people within a community.
4. Civic Institutions: This looks at the health of democracy and governance at both local and national level, considering quality, trust and satisfaction.
5. Economic Value: This looks at the tangible assets which hold a monetary and/or economic value to an individual or family within a community
6. Positive Social Norms: This looks at the personal well-being and cultural attitudes of individuals and families in a community, including people's wider habits, behaviours and activities

Colour coding: The colour coding has been applied to each score category and is comparative between the six places. The highest score for each category is colour dark green and the lowest dark red. For example, compared to all other places, Bradford scored lowest on economic value and positive social norms.

⁶ UK Social Fabric Index By Onward (2020).

Local context

Community

A 2019 survey of local people in Devonport and Stonehouse found that people like where they live and report a high level of satisfaction with local services. 75% are very or fairly satisfied with their area and 80% are satisfied with local services.⁷

A higher proportion of those surveyed in Devonport and Stonehouse (37%) think the area has got better, in contrast to the national average of 14%.⁸ 59% of people in Devonport and Stonehouse think that the community pulls together (59%), with a slightly higher than average proportion of people feeling they can influence decisions (29% versus 25% national average).⁹

Challenges

85% of people surveyed in Devonport and Stonehouse, said that if they want to socialise then they can, which is lower than the national average of 91%. Only 28% report borrowing or exchanging things with neighbours, lower than the national average of 35%. 29% of people surveyed in Devonport and Stonehouse report being lonely often, or some of the time.¹⁰

Economy

Customer spending data from the area suggests that local customers spend a lower proportion of their money on items associated with 'disposable income' (44%) than is reflected by local business sales (57%). This means most businesses in the area provide products and services associated with 'disposable income' (e.g., entertainment and takeaways), whereas customers are spending a significant proportion of individual expenditure on items classified associated with cost of living (e.g., transport and groceries).

Data also suggest that general sales growth was down by 13.4% between April and August 2020 and that growth in customers was down by 0.2%.¹¹

⁷ Neighbourhood [Community Life Survey](#) (2019)

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Hyperlocal Community Life Survey Report 2018, commissioned by Power to Change (2018)

¹¹ Power to Change data from [Reward](#) (2018)

Voluntary and Community Sector

In 2018, turnover data is available for 374 voluntary and community sector organisations in Plymouth. The combined turnover of these organisations was £284 million. With the economy of Plymouth worth £4.99 billion in 2016, this means that voluntary and community sector accounted for approximately 5.7% of the local economy.¹²

Small- to medium-sized organisations with a turnover between £5,000 and £5 million are most relevant to the programme, as these are the organisations that Empowering Places catalyst organisations are most likely to partner with or influence in their local area. Of the total number of organisations for which turnover data is available in 2018, 314 organisations were in this category and had a combined turnover of £78 million, accounting for 27.5% of the total £284 million turnover.¹³

MyCake analysis of the published financial data of voluntary and community sector organisations in Plymouth suggests that in any given year, approximately 40% of organisations in the area make a net loss.¹⁴

A financial analysis of non-profits in Plymouth between 2014-2017 shows:

– The total income of the not-for-profit sector in Plymouth has been growing year on year since 2014.

¹² MyCake analysis of Companies House and Charity Commission Data, Office of National Statistics (April 2020)

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

Funding Landscape

Funding	Plymouth ¹⁵
Top five significant funders and amounts between 2017-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (£23 million) – Department for Education (£17 million) – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (£11 million) – Department for Transport (£8 million) – Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (£7 million)
Total number of funders in Plymouth who have provided data to 360Giving (2017-2020)	53
Total value of grants awarded in Plymouth by Power to Change (end of 2020)	£1.9 million

¹⁵ 360Giving [GrantNav](#) (Dec 2020)

04. The Empowering Places catalyst: Real Ideas

Real Ideas Organisation CIC (Real Ideas) was set up in 2007 to support social enterprise and develop innovative projects across Plymouth, the South West and beyond. It has extensive experience of taking on and redeveloping assets (such as the Devonport Guildhall and the Market Hall), setting up businesses and running educational programmes. It provides affordable and flexible office space for SMEs to grow and develop, and capacity building support for community businesses.

Vision for the Empowering Places programme

Real Ideas' 5-year plan sets out its ambitions that entrepreneurialism is encouraged and wealth is generated sustainably, and stays in the area to improve the quality of life for all. It aims for everyone to have access to meaningful work – work that they can see makes a difference to their community, the environment and the world; and that community business and wider social entrepreneurial approaches are seen as commonplace careers for all.

Wider activities of Real Ideas

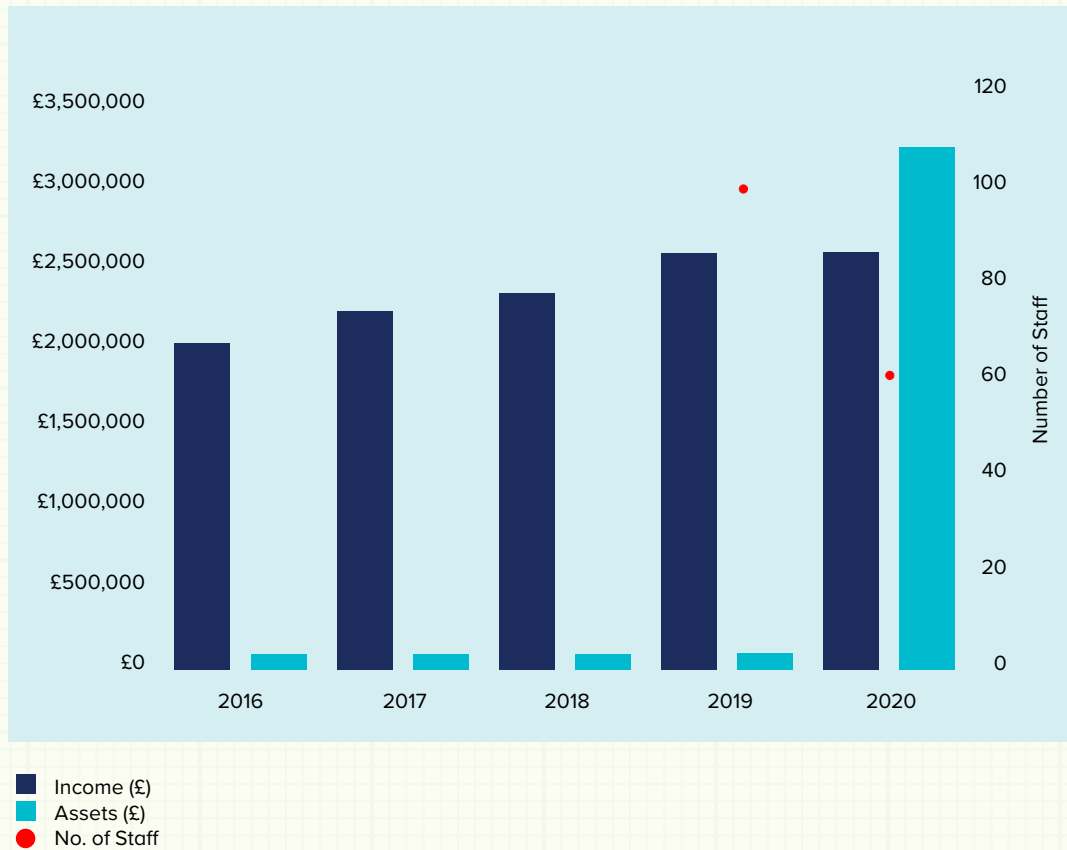
In addition to the community business support programme funded by Empowering Places, Real Ideas also provides support for under 25s, is the Arts Council's Bridge organisation for the South West and has a number of spaces including studios for hire for local artists and creative businesses. Real Ideas also manages the Enrich and Green Minds programmes which focus on how social enterprise and community business thinking can be used to find positive solutions to sustaining Plymouth's parks and aim to encourage nature-based solutions respectively.

As of the 2020 year-end, Real Ideas had a total income of £2.4 million and assets worth £3.1 million.¹⁶ The figure below shows Real Ideas' self-reported total income, value of assets and staff head count between 2016 and 2020.¹⁷

¹⁶ MyCake analysis of Companies House and Charity Commission Data, Office of National Statistics (April 2020)

¹⁷ Power to Change Annual Grantee Survey (2020). The data presented here is self-reported by the Catalyst organisation to Power to Change, with missing data points indicating that no data was submitted.

Real Ideas Organisation: Total Income, Value of Assets and Staff Head Count between 2016-2020



Empowering Places delivery

The position of Empowering Places within the wider catalyst organisation

The focus and ethos of the Empowering Places programme are well aligned with Real Ideas as an organisation, which describes itself as being ‘catalytic’ and which has long worked with local organisations to help them strengthen and connect within the community. Real Ideas staff feel that the fit with Empowering Places is greater than with programmes they have been involved with in the past which aligned with perhaps only 80% of their values and so felt less comfortable to work with.

Where Empowering Places represents a slight departure for Real Ideas is that the programme is focused solely on community businesses, while Real Ideas tends not to differentiate between types of businesses that are delivering social good and has an equal focus on social and creative enterprises. What this means is that within the programme, Real Ideas works only with community businesses, but outside of Empowering Places, it is offering similar support to organisations with a social purpose but different delivery models.

Aims of Empowering Places locally

Real Ideas’ Empowering Places five-year plan focuses on how it will catalyse transformational change through creating a sustainable pipeline of connected activity at both a grassroots and strategic level.

By 2022, Real Ideas is aiming to have a growing community business and social enterprise ecology centred within Plymouth’s commitment to inclusive growth and green recovery. An inclusive growth strategy has been adopted by the Plymouth Growth Board, committing Plymouth City Council (PCC), the business community and the third sector to innovate; develop new approaches that reduce inequality; build wealth in communities; and in doing so work with, and for, the natural local environment. These ambitions have been given even greater priority and vitality through the city’s Resurgam: Covid Economic Recovery Plan. Real Ideas is also aiming to develop an inclusive growth leadership programme, bringing together a cohort from the private, public and third sector, including community business leaders.

Finally, Real Ideas aims to continue being a part of a city that is increasingly well networked and resilient with a business ecology that takes community businesses seriously and sees the value of diverse business models that build local wealth and create benefit for all.

In order to achieve these aims by 2022, Real Ideas is engaged with Plymouth's Resurgam Covid Recovery Plan, in the following key areas:

- Work with at least one neighbourhood management company to develop its potential as a community business and a pipeline for community improvement.**
- Provide ongoing business support and facilitate training/skills development to existing groups and new groups as they come forward to set up a community business.**
- Provide ongoing leadership/entrepreneurship support for individuals and groups demonstrating energy and drive to lead community business.**
- Develop peer connectors as community business leaders able to support a start-up community business and wider movement building.**
- Work with Power to Change and partners and develop next-generation social impact measurement approaches largely drawing on available data from social media and other online sources.**
- Deliver the Inclusive Growth board and leadership programme involving community businesses and contributing to Real Ideas' ability to deliver the programme's legacy with flourishing community businesses located at the heart of a sustainable economy.**
- Community Land Banking – piloting a community land banking Special Purpose Vehicle company to explore new mechanisms for enabling community ownership of land and buildings.**

Relationships and levels of influence

Real Ideas has a wide network of both national and local organisations. In a relationship mapping exercise carried out by Shared Assets, Real Ideas identified that it holds over 50 relationships in total. This includes relationships with voluntary sector organisations, commercial organisations, community businesses, collaborators, funders and commissioners.¹⁸

Type of Relationship	Number of Relationships	Mode Strength of Influence (1-3)	Mode Strength of Relationship (1-3)
Collaborator	42	2	2
Commissioner	1	3	1
Community Business	2	1	2.5
Funder	10	3	3
Political	2	3	2.5
Total	57		

¹⁸ Shared Asset Relationship Mapping of Empowering Places (Sept 2020). RAG rating: Based on a scale of 1-3. Red (1-1.9), Yellow (2.0-2.9) and Green (3)

Approach to delivering Empowering Places

Real Ideas is working with more community businesses than other catalysts in the programme. It is taking a differential approach to support, tailoring it to the individual organisations they work with and the stage that they are at in their development. Some of this support is being provided directly by Real Ideas itself while some is provided by delivery partners (including Nudge Community Builders and Iridescent Ideas) that Real Ideas has subcontracted to help it to deliver the programme locally.

The community businesses that Real Ideas supports are fairly disparate both in geographical location and in focus. Some of them existed in some form before connecting with Real Ideas or the Empowering Places programme, while most have been developed as a result of the programme. Real Ideas is very well established and connected within the local area. Through community connections, via collaborations and other strands of work it is able to identify potential community businesses and then support them via a combination of in-house Empowering Places team support and/or through one of its delivery partners.

Where Real Ideas is providing more direct support, this varies hugely in both intensity and focus. As well as helping with business planning and set up, Real has a strong emphasis on using its local networks to help connect the developing businesses, for example linking them with other similar businesses, with other emerging community businesses for peer support or with organisations that might be able to provide other support or funding.

The main delivery partners that Real Ideas works with – Nudge and Iridescent Ideas – both bring different types of support to the catalyst process and so extend Real Ideas' offer to community businesses. Nudge is itself a Community Benefit Society (and one of the community businesses that Real Ideas is supporting) and was set up to bring empty buildings in Stonehouse back to use. As an Empowering Places delivery partner, Nudge works directly with several emerging community businesses, drawing on its own experience as a community business to provide a mentoring role. It provides support on governance and legal structure as well as working with the developing businesses to help them enhance their profile in the local area. Iridescent Ideas is a Community Interest Company which provides business support for community business, social enterprise, coops and charities. It works with a small number of the Stonehouse and Devonport community businesses, providing them with support around governance and legal structure, impact and business development, including helping them to register and to think about their future structure, vision and mission.

Impact of Empowering Places on Real Ideas so far

Early evidence from Real Ideas staff and delivery partners suggests that the Empowering Places programme is having an impact on Real Ideas as an organisation in three key ways.

First, it is increasing the organisation's capacity, both in terms of time and skills, to work with community businesses. Real Ideas is the largest of the catalysts in the programme and already did a lot of working to support local groups and businesses, but the programme has expanded the organisation's reach and meant that it has more resources to offer them:

It's enabled us to focus on and grow and support the growth of a bunch of organisations and community businesses that we would otherwise have struggled to help – Real Ideas Staff/Tech Lead

Having the extra capacity and community business focus has also meant that Real Ideas has become embedded in local conversations and pieces of work that it may not have done otherwise.

Second, being a part of the programme has resulted in a slight shift in the organisation's thinking. While Real Ideas might have delivered similar activities if it had not taken part in Empowering Places, it would not have had such a specific focus on community ownership and community business as a structure. Real Ideas' is organisationally agnostic about social business structures, and instead aims to be customer focused and client led. However, the Power to Change brief has given Real Ideas the opportunity to focus on and work with community businesses specifically in a way that it has not before.

Finally, the programme has had an impact on the organisation's partnerships and collaborations. Real Ideas is very well networked as an organisation, but being a part of the programme has given it the opportunity to strengthen some of its existing relationships and create new ones. Staff and delivery partners interviewed reflected on the fact that, while partnerships are one of Real Ideas' key strengths and the organisation is active in many local conversations, being a part of the programme has given Real Ideas staff more agency in some of their relationships. Staff have also welcomed the opportunity to develop new relationships with organisations like Coops UK, CLES and NEF (delivery partners for the Empowering Places programme), both specifically on the programme and in a more strategic way.

Support and funding drawn down from the Empowering Places programme

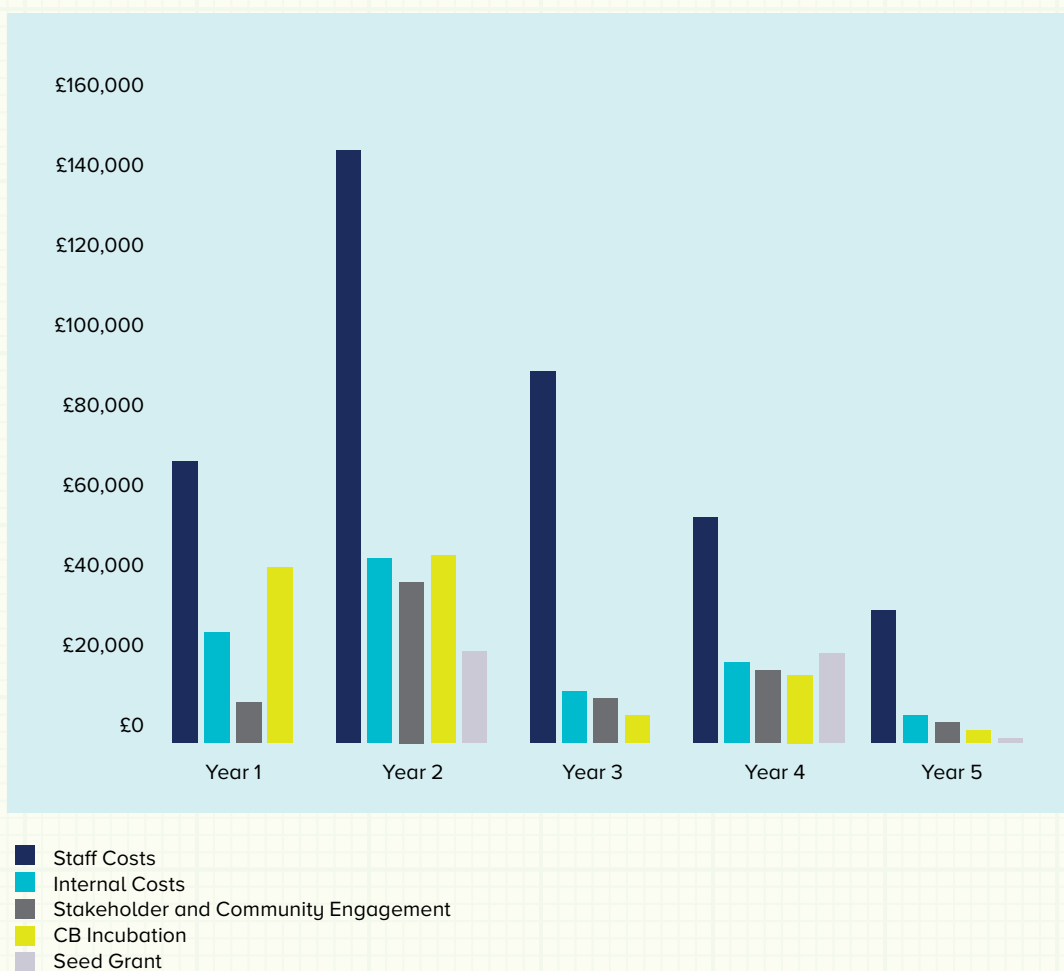
Support for catalyst organisation	Real Ideas ¹⁹
Power to Change, Empowering Places Funding	£749,940
Tailored support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work on impact and evaluation framework Requested: 22 days valued at £11,000 Used: 8 days so far 2. Support for the municipalism conference Requested: 8 days valued at £4,000 Used: None so far 3. Coaching cohort 1 Requested: 2.7 days valued at £1,350 Used: None so far 4. Community shares support for Nudge Requested: 4 days valued at £2,000 Used: All 4 days 5. Business Development skills support Requested: 10 days valued at £5,000 Used: All 10 days 6. Legal structure review for Cooperative Community Landbanking project Requested: 9 Days valued at £4,500 Used: None so far 7. Community engagement Requested: 3 days valued at £1,500 Used: 1 day so far 8. Digital marketing strategy, campaign and branding Requested: 6.5 days valued at £3,250 Used: None so far 9. Governance Support Requested: 4 days valued at £2,000 Used: All 4 days

¹⁹ Power to Change Airtable Charting (As of March 2021)

Total tailored support used	Requested: 69.2 days valued at £34,600 Used: 27 days, invoicing £13,500
Other capacity support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Equipment – Event costs – Support to community businesses – Staff training – Communication support
Total other capacity support	Requested: £35,800 Invoiced: £17,229
Support for Community Businesses	
Seed grants	Dispersed 5 seed grants totalling £20,500
Tailored support	Requested 36.5 days support for 3 community businesses valued at £18,250 Used: 19 days, with £9,500 invoiced

The figure below provides a breakdown of the financial support claimed by Real Ideas Organisation between years one and two of the Empowering Places programme, as well as the requested amount for the remaining three years of the programme.²⁰ Staff Costs includes the cost of freelance support, and internal costs includes office rental, equipment, travel, subsistence, marketing, communications and events costs.

Breakdown of Financial Support Claimed (in Years 1-2) and Requested (Years 3-5)



²⁰ Power to Change Grant Overview Snapshot (As of March 2021)

Impact of capacity support provided by the Empowering Places programme

Real Ideas' views of the support that it needs for its community businesses have inevitably shifted as the programme has developed. When Empowering Places started, Real Ideas found that it took a while to understand both what capacity support was available and what worked best for the team and the community businesses they are working with. Community Business wasn't a commonly understood framing for people and communities, and in some ways was an additional set of asks for people to get used to. This required a larger focus on communications, learning and advocacy activity in the initial stages of the programme before a community understanding and a working community business pipeline developed.

In the first two years, there was really quite a lot of trying stuff out and getting stuff going, and it's really only once things are going that you work out exactly what they need, and they have a development plan that you can start pulling stuff in – Real Ideas Staff or Tech Lead

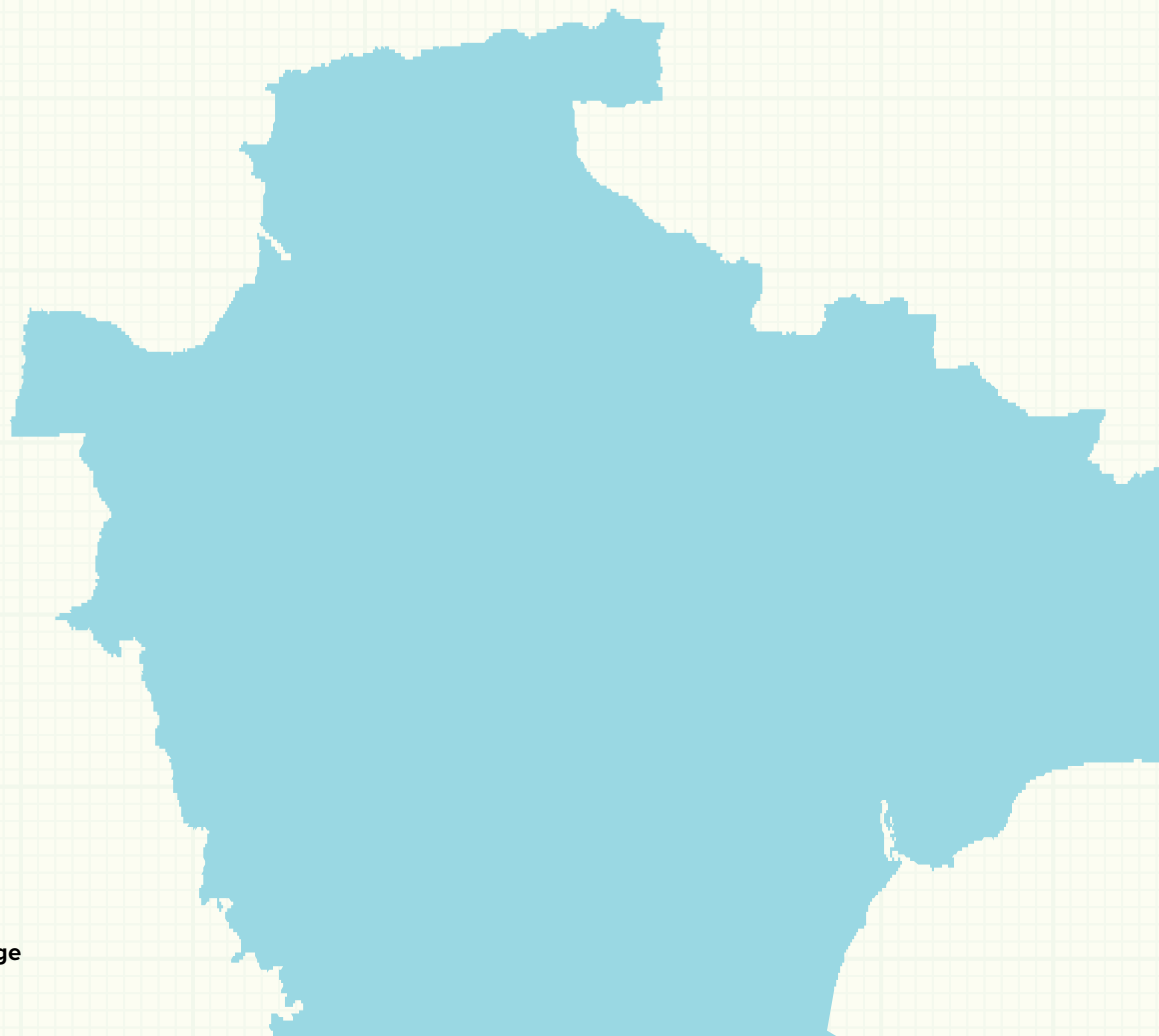
As a catalyst, Real Ideas likes the idea of the support provider pool and the way that it has developed over time to become more tailored and flexible and would like to use it more but has ultimately found that often the community businesses' support requests are for something quite specific (e.g., architects) or from a more local provider with whom the community business had an existing relationship. Particularly at the early stage, Real Ideas found support was best provided directly by its own team or delivery partners, and that the need for the sorts of wider support that can be found within the provider pool came later.

I think our experience generally is that people need a lot of support but they sort of need it from somebody they know – Real Ideas Staff or Tech Lead

To an extent, the Real Ideas team also feels as though some of the support that is on offer through the provider pool is more generic and geographically based elsewhere. Where they are more inclined to access the support provided by Empowering Places is when it is focused on more specific sector skills and knowledge that isn't immediately available through local contacts.

Real Ideas has a very good relationship with its programme Tech Lead and values the fact that she is local, nationally connected and has additional skills all of which she is able to draw on while supporting Real Ideas. Real Ideas staff have also highly valued the peer support that the programme offers both through more informal channels and at more formal interactions such as the Learning Camps.

It's been really brilliant actually working with the other catalysts sort of understanding the way they do things and the way they operate and seeing a diversity, a different approach and also then having some sort of peer affirmation that we're doing stuff that's kind of right or even we're wrestling with the same issues – Real Ideas Staff/Tech Lead



The community businesses supported by Real Ideas

No	Community Business	Type	Support from Empowering Places programme ²¹
1	Snapdragons Plymouth CIC	A group of parents who offer an alternative for children's education and learning	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
2	Nudge Community Builders	Creative community led ways to improve public spaces and places and connect people	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Requested support to achieve standard mark for 4 days at £2,000. Used all 4 days.
3	Column Community Event	Provides local events for the community	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
4	The Underground Theatre CIC	Community Theatre for everyone	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
5	Street Factory CIC	Uses all elements of Hip Hop -transforming lives for young people	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
6	Billy Ruffians Brewery	A community brewery developing waste bread-based beer and local beer	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Requested business support for 14 days at £7,000. All 14 days have been used.
7	Yoga Loft Plymouth	Yoga studio offering classes and workshops	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.

²¹Power to Change Airtable Charting (As of March 2021)

8	Red Velvet Cinema	For senior citizens, showing classic films once-a-fortnight with tea and talks	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Requested community business support for 3 days at £1,500. 1 day has been used so far.
9	Pollenize CIC	Introduce apiaries (beehives) to high profile buildings in the centre of urban communities to reverse pollinator decline	Seed Grant: Requested seed grant of £500. Capacity Support: Requested Marketing and communications support and community engagement support for a total of 9.5 days at £4,750. 1 day has been used so far.
10	Stonehouse Voice	Community news publication for Stonehouse	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
11	Bike Space	A not-for-profit social enterprise providing bike repairs, upcycling, and skills development	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
12	St Saviours	A disused church, not in the Devonport and Stonehouse area but supports wider place outcomes	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from Real Ideas. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.

Emerging impact on community businesses and the wider community

The community businesses that Real Ideas is working with are all at very different stages, and there are mixed views and experiences among catalyst and community business staff about the degree of impact that has taken place so far both at a community business and wider community level.

At a community business level, it's clear that there are some instances where Empowering Places has been directly responsible for either initiating or accelerating the development of a community business. Some community businesses feel that they would not have existed had it not been for the Empowering Places programme because they would not have known where to start or who to speak to locally.

Really gave me an opportunity that's just unmissable... I could never ever have funded this myself or indeed maybe would have thought about it, I would have thought it was well beyond my reach – Community Business Staff

Others credit the programme with expediting or facilitating their development, identifying that the programme came at a good time for Plymouth as it helped to add momentum to a set of existing initiatives.

I honestly think if we didn't have that initial contact where we were asked to take part in what we're doing right now to develop the business, I think things would have stagnated with what we could have achieved. It's 100% allowed us to push the business forward in what is and could have been a really difficult time – Community Business Staff

While some community businesses may have developed anyway, there is a sense that the programme has helped to move things along, by giving groups wanting to become community businesses the tools and framework to do it within. And there is a recognition of the power that the wider programme holds and the fact that through Empowering Places, these community businesses are tapping into an extended network that not only has the potential to assist with sustainability but also helps with credibility.

Real Ideas has] been able to start some really, really good community businesses and secured quite a lot of resilient kind of ownership for the future as well around parks and buildings and stuff. It's kind of turbo-charged things quite a lot. I think having the Power to Change brand to that is really helpful to that as well, it brings a lot of legitimacy. And to say it is] working with NEF and Co-ops UK and CLES – Real Ideas Staff/Tech Lead

The role that Real Ideas has played in connecting individuals and community businesses with other local organisations is also really valued and seen to have opened up a world of new support, funding and training opportunities. There is a sense that the programme is helping to create a new peer support network of community businesses which, while still embryonic, has the potential to provide valuable support and impact.

I think it's really kind of joined up those different little pockets of people that interact with each other as community businesses better – Real Ideas Staff/Tech Lead

My network has absolutely exploded round about the people who I want to talk to – Community Business Staff

The new partnerships that community businesses are creating are also credited with improving the businesses' profile within the city and some participants reflected on how this may increase the potential for impact in the future.

However, it's worth noting that while the Empowering Places programme is seen as having a big impact in the development of local community businesses, there is a recognition that it is one of several factors in the Plymouth area that is encouraging a new focus on community and grassroots organisations, and some participants pointed out that it is hard to disentangle the influences and attribute impact to any one factor or programme.

There is less evidence of the impact of the programme on the wider community at this point. Impact of this sort is always hard to identify and one view is that this is because the community businesses are not yet well established enough to be having a wider impact on the community. However, there is also a view among some stakeholders that the programme is not having as much impact on the local community as it might otherwise because the nature of the community businesses that Real Ideas is supporting means that they are not really addressing the needs of the community. There is an aspiration among some of the community businesses that the impact of the programme will be clearly visible to someone visiting Devonport or Stonehouse because they will see community businesses thriving, being used by and delivering to the community. But at the time that this research was carried out in 2020, there was a concern among some community businesses that this will not happen because the programme was at that point felt to be largely supporting individuals with ideas rather than creating community businesses in response to a gap in the local area.

For me that's the difference between a community business that is created to meet a need and to sort of service the area versus a community business that kinda looks great but actually does it make any difference, really? – Community Business Staff

Those participants with this view felt that, at the time of the research, the programme has provided people involved in developing community businesses with time, advice and thinking space, but that this has yet to translate into any tangible benefits or social impact for Devonport or Stonehouse.

05. Impact of Covid-19 on the local area

According to the Social Economy Data Lab (SEDL), Plymouth falls into one of the more vulnerable quintiles for Covid, scoring 4 out of 5 on the vulnerability scoring.²² The table below scores various relevant risk factors out of 10 in comparison to the five other Empowering Places.

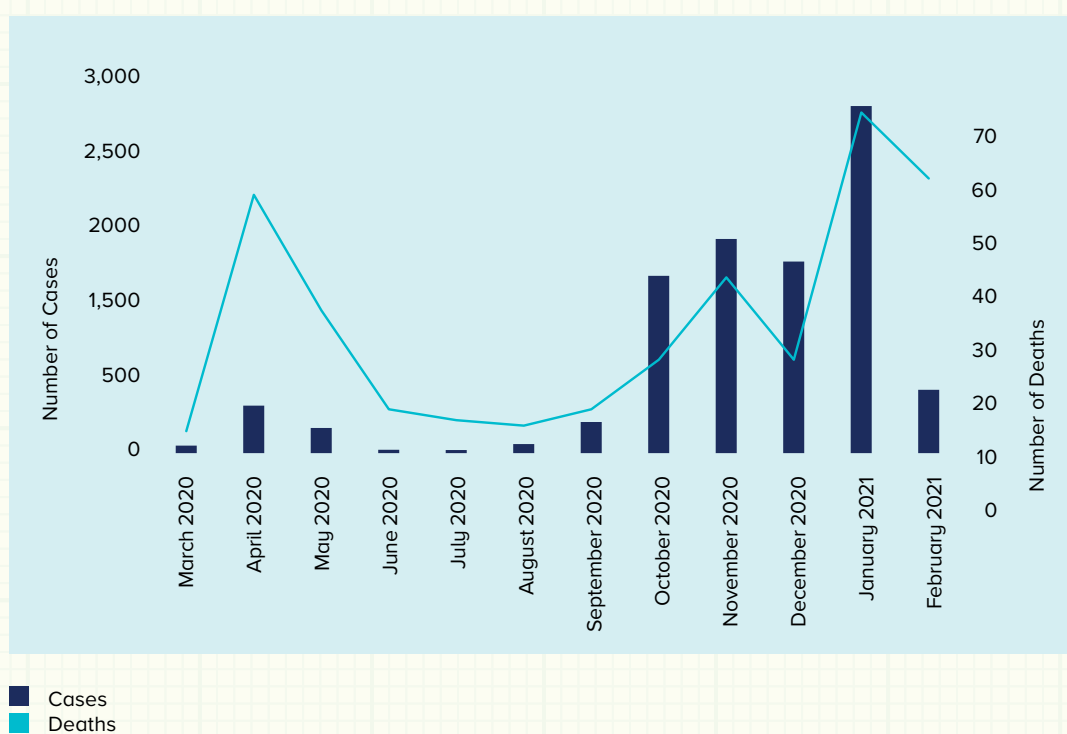
Indicator ²³	Plymouth	Grimsby	Bradford	Leicester	Wigan	Hartlepool
Total 70+ population	9.34	10	7.32	5.85	9.26	9.15
Obese adults	8.39	10	8.75	7.99	8.77	9.37
People aged 15 who are regular smokers	7.95	10	9.62	4.97	6.44	10
Receiving benefits for health or disability	6.57	7.48	6.54	6.47	6.60	10
Self-reported at-risk groups	8.76	8.35	8.56	9.05	9.45	10
Underlying health issues	8.02	8.63	9.44	8.00	8.66	10
Key workers	9.16	10	9.22	9.15	7.55	9.61
Vulnerable jobs	9.44	10	9.00	9.19	9.10	9.15
Vulnerable businesses	8.78	10	8.72	8.22	8.03	8.96
Groups requiring additional support	7.08	7.34	8.06	10.00	6.48	7.98

²² Covid-19 and Communities: [Mapping the Covid-19 Effect](#) by Social Economy Data Lab (2020)

²³ Local Insights (2020). Each risk factors is scored out of 10 in comparison to the other Empowering Places locations, with a score of 10 indicating the highest risk.

The figure below shows the number of new Covid-19 cases and deaths as per date of test and date of death in Plymouth. In total, at the time of writing (March 2021), Plymouth has had more than 8,900 cases and 290 deaths since the start of the pandemic.²⁴

Monthly Covid-19 Cases and Deaths in Plymouth



²⁴ Coronavirus Data [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) (As of 18th March 2021)

What Covid-19 means for Plymouth

Covid-19 related restrictions have had an impact on Plymouth's retail sector. As shown below, data from the Social Economy Data Lab indicates that while grocery sales increased for the first three months between April 2020 and June 2020 in comparison to the previous year, total sales decreased sharply between April and May. Total sales then started to increase again during the summer period, while grocery sales decreased.²⁵

Month	Grocery Sales Change (month to previous year)	Total Sales Change (month to previous year)
Apr-20	0 – 20% Increase	20 – 40% Decrease
May-20	0 – 20% Increase	20 – 40% Decrease
Jun-20	0 – 20% Increase	0 – 20% Increase
Jul-20	0 – 20% Decrease	0 – 20% Increase
Aug-20	0 – 20% Decrease	0 – 20% Increase

There are six different mutual aid groups in Plymouth. These groups serve a total population of 263,100 people, therefore they each service a population of approximately 43,850 people. This is almost double the national average, which is roughly 23,900 people served per Covid-19 mutual aid group.²⁶ This means that Plymouth is relatively underserved compared to the national average, despite the fact that data suggest that its population is comparatively vulnerable.

²⁵ Covid-19 and Communities: [Mapping the Covid-19 Effect](#) by Social Economy Data Lab (2020)

²⁶ [Covid Mutual Aid Calculation](#) (2020)

Impact of Covid-19 on Real Ideas Organisation and its approach to Empowering Places

The impact of Covid-19 on Real Ideas itself was minimal at the point that staff were interviewed for the evaluation fairly early on in the pandemic. The impact has since become more significant but described as 'managed' by Real Ideas staff. Staff reflected on the fact that a considerable refocussing of the business has been required but also that the organisation is comparatively big, agile and resilient and so not reliant on Empowering Places alone. Some of its buildings have had to close and some staff have had to be furloughed during the various lockdowns, but many of the organisation's staff have been able to work from home relatively easily and initially at least, the organisation's cash position remained strong. However, staff are certainly concerned about the future and expect that the looming economic crisis will likely take a heavier toll on the organisation at some point.

To continue the momentum with Empowering Places, Real Ideas has delivered more of its support virtually. It created Real Ideas Online, a programme of online content which is designed to support a range of businesses and organisations during Covid-19 and beyond. This included a series of 12 webinars covering a range of topics including tackling challenges during Covid which went out to a range of local organisations including some of the community businesses. Real Ideas staff feel that increasing the organisation's online offer has actually helped it to reach a wider section of the local community.

Alongside this, Real Ideas has worked with its community businesses to keep them as active as possible and allow staff to still receive an income while restrictions are in place. This includes continuing to support them on developing their business structure, model and capital projects as well as support with developing websites and putting them through training such as community business leadership programmes.

Some community businesses have had particular funding issues as a result of the pandemic, so Real Ideas has had to adapt its support to help them respond to specific issues. Overall, however, catalyst staff have felt that their partnerships with the community businesses have become stronger during this period and they have looked for opportunities for the community businesses to come together and support each other in new ways, for example by suggesting that all the community businesses that are closely located collaborate where they can.

Impact of Covid-19 on community businesses

The crisis has had a different effect on each business depending on their model and the stage of development they were at. All have been impacted in one way or another but while some have largely managed to ride it out, others have had to implement major changes to support themselves and the communities they serve.

The staff at Pollenize, a conservation, pollination and rewilding project, considered themselves to have got off comparatively lightly during the first lockdown. The business has very small overheads and it was able to launch an online shop which generated a little income. A small support package from Empowering Places also helped to pay for their time and enabled them to keep their heads above water. Likewise, while Billy Ruffians, the community brewery, had to stop a lot of activity when the crisis first took hold, because they were not yet fully up and running it did not affect their trading income beyond delaying it.

Those who were on the cusp of receiving funding felt the sudden shutdown more keenly. Real Ideas was supporting several community businesses who were applying to Power to Change for grant funding when everything shut down and they had to put all their planned activity on hold. Some, like Stiltskin Soapbox Theatre will receive emergency funding from Power to Change which will make a difference.

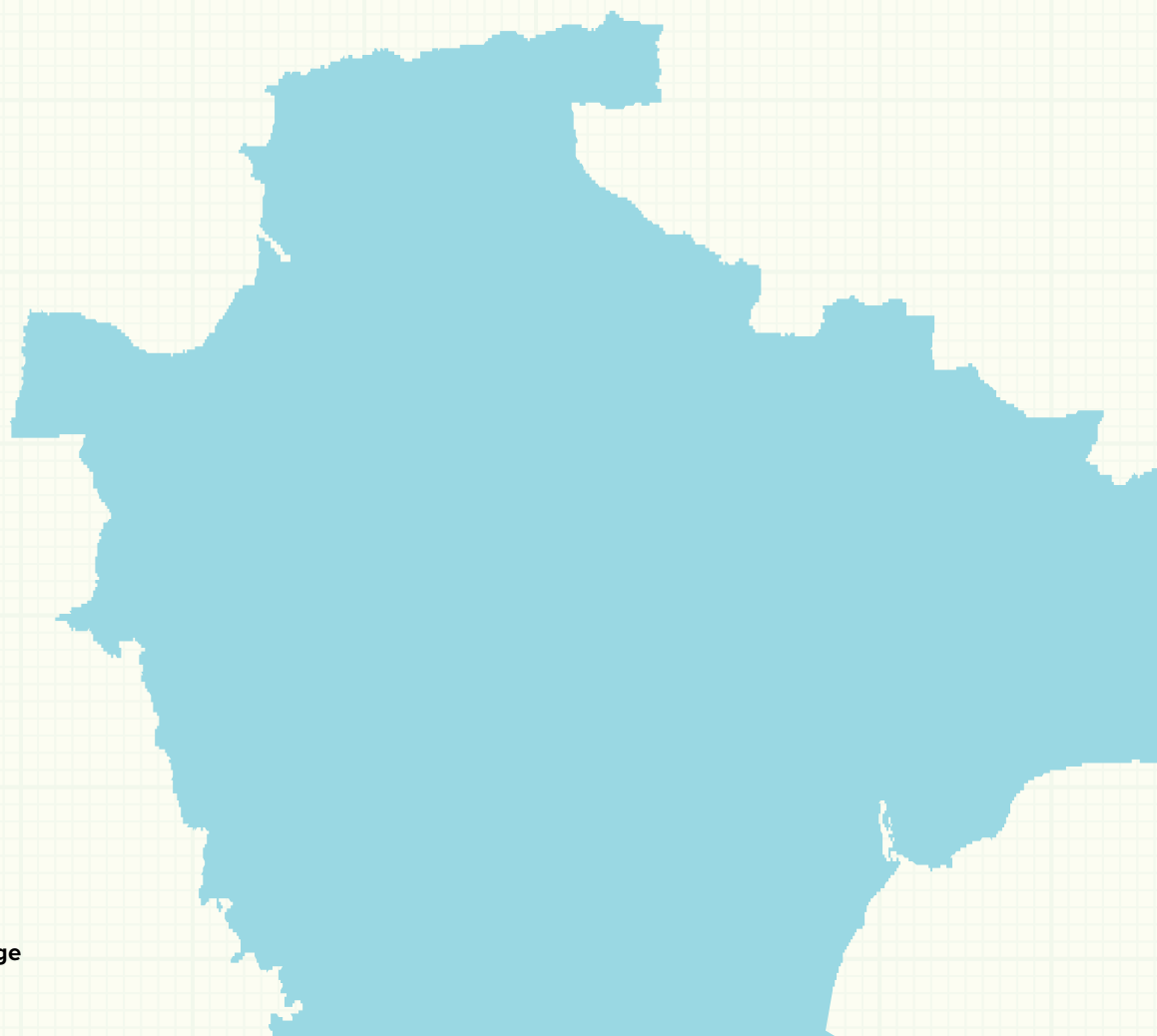
Organisations like Nudge Community Builders that rely more heavily on trading income and lost a large portion of it when restrictions came in, have found this period very difficult. While the business was relatively financially stable it had a lot of adjustments to make and has been very concerned about the impact on the community it works with. The Nudge team have worked hard to try and respond to some of the urgent need from local families, for example by partnering with a local repair shop to give families who need it access to technology. Nudge also qualified for government grants and were able to give about 60% of those grants to the people that operate in their buildings to help them sustain themselves through the crisis.

The crisis has prompted many of the community businesses to innovate, and some have managed to adapt their business model so that it runs in a different way. The brewery Billy Ruffians, for example, started doing direct sales and delivering beer using a cargo bike while pubs and bars were closed. The Scrapstore started making 'Let's Create' packs of scrap materials aimed at young people and have sold them through various organisations to keep them afloat. This has been successful and has led to them developing a product that they may be able to continue to sell into the future.

As well as inevitably doing a lot of work online, some of the community businesses have found innovative ways to keep themselves connected to the community. The Village Hub staff (formally Stoke Stars) were keen to carry on doing consultation work with local residents and so found a bench that was the right length for social distancing and invited community members to come and sit and talk to them. And Stiltskin delivered a programme of outdoor shows over the summer and has started work on an Art Garden to broaden the types of performances they can put on safely to larger numbers.

While the crisis has been challenging across the board, some of the community businesses have taken the opportunity of the national shutdown to reflect on their approach and use the time as productively as possible. There is a sense among some of them that the lockdown reduced the weight of expectation and allowed them to slow down, focus on what they're aiming to deliver and think more creatively.

Whatever you do it can, in a sense only be welcomed positively, 'cause if you're actually able to operate financially and have some kind of social impact, in this climate, you come out of that looking quite good, if you have the support to do that – Community Business Staff



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