



RETROFIT CONNECT  
STREET DEMONSTRATOR AND  
INCUBATOR PROFILES



## MEET THE RETROFIT CONNECT COHORT

For the past number of months we have been working with the nine groups, profiled in this document, as part of an innovative programme of peer learning and retrofit industry expertise connection.

The aim of the Retrofit Connect programme is to showcase community and civic society innovation in retrofit, accelerate their impact through knowledge exchange with each other and connection with industry specialists, and identify replicable and scalable components of just and equitable retrofit initiatives.

Stay connected via our newsletter to hear the latest news from the programme [here](#).

### ABOUT THE NATIONAL RETROFIT HUB

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The National Retrofit Hub (NRH) is a Community Interest Company focused on improving how housing retrofit is delivered equitably at scale.

We do this by convening the retrofit community, building and sharing evidence on what works, and supporting action that leads to better outcomes for people, homes, buildings, and places.

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These profiles were authored through the collective work of the cohort. If you wish to reference any of the content in this document, please also reference the individual organisations involved.

### PHOTO CREDITS

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## ABOUT RETROFIT CONNECT

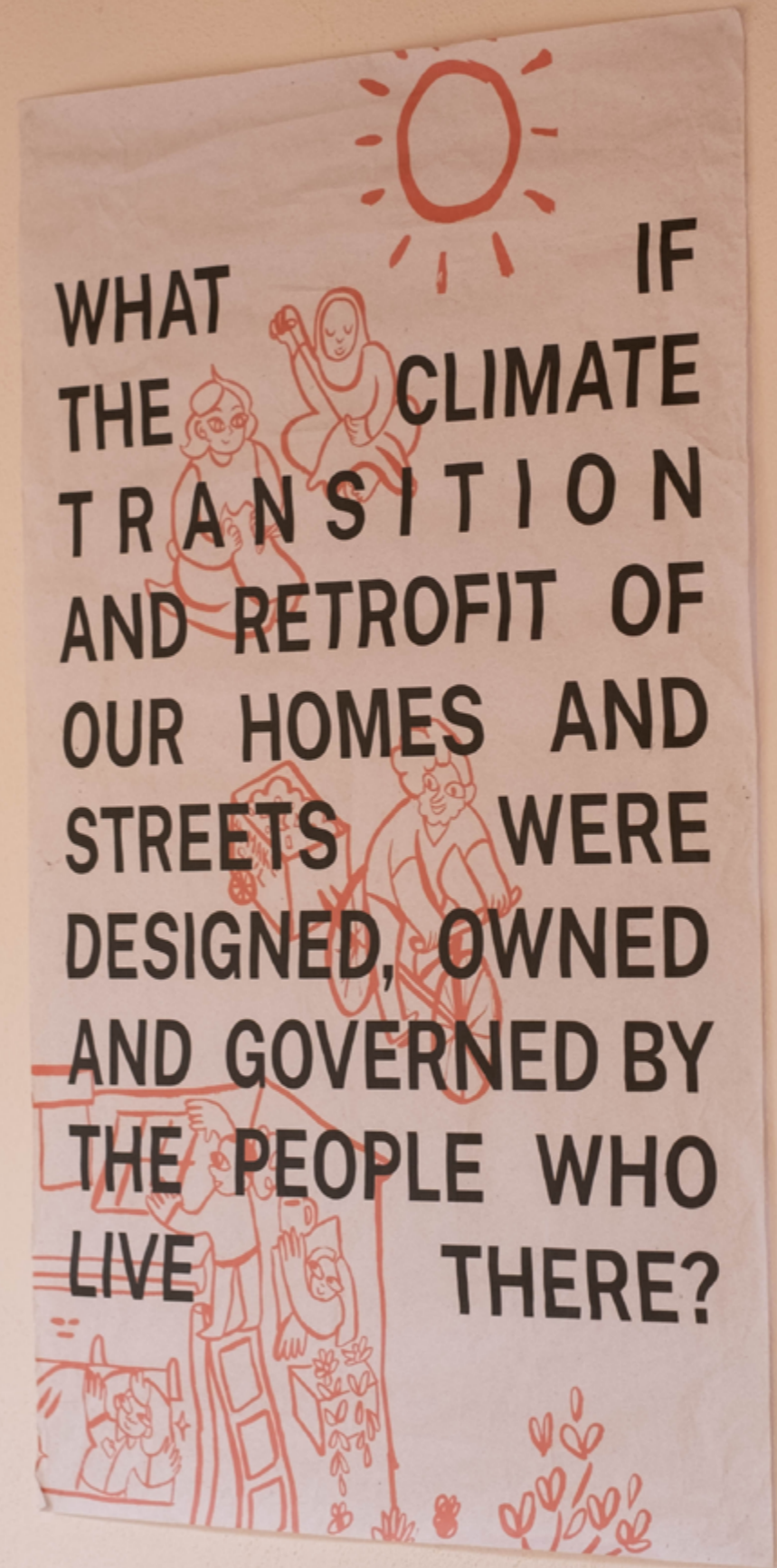
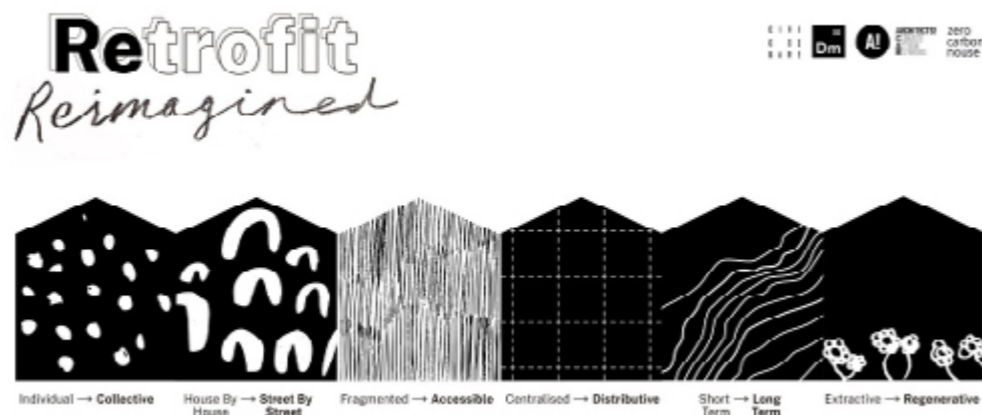
*Retrofit Connect is an 18-month programme of collective learning for community-led organisations and innovators who are involved in or creating retrofit initiatives within their neighbourhood.*

*It began with a foundational question, developed through the Retrofit Reimagined movement led by CIVIC SQUARE, "what if the climate transition of our homes and streets were designed, owned, and governed by the people who live there?"*

This question speaks directly to longstanding and well-evidenced challenges in retrofit delivery. Too often, people are excluded from the process and brought in only at the point of consultation, if at all, after critical decisions have been made. When this happens, the outcomes that resonate most with communities are easily missed.

By creating a national tapestry of innovators and those who can support them through our **Retrofit Community of Industry\*** initiative, the programme is building a picture of what community-led retrofit can achieve when citizens are supported and people come together.

*\* See page 42 for more information about the Retrofit Community of Industry*





## THE STORY SO FAR

Retrofit Connect, the Street Demonstrator & Incubator Programme, and the Retrofit Community of Industry are all parts of one living ecosystem movement to make community-led retrofit the norm, not the exception.

### *2022 - 2023 Retrofit Reimagined*

The NRH connected with Retrofit Reimagined as a partner to highlight the role of communities and civic-led organisations in climate and housing justice.

## BUILDING A MOVEMENT FIT FOR THE FUTURE, NOT JUST THE MOMENT

The NRH will continue to support community-led and place-based retrofit initiatives, amplifying our collective impact as a network through the [Retrofit Community of Industry](#).

### *2024 NRH State of the Nation Review*

The NRH's State of the Nation Review identified a need for place-based approaches which enable deep community involvement in retrofit design and delivery.

### *2023 NRH Objectives*

In 2023, the NRH set the following as one of its first objectives: "pathways for replicable community driven retrofit initiatives are available and supported."

### *2025 - First Street Demonstrators and Incubators welcomed*

In 2024, CIVIC SQUARE invited NRH to co-create the Street Demonstrator and Incubator Programme. In June 2025, the first cohort of incubators were welcomed.





## TECHNICAL THEMES



*Through a process of co-design the following themes were identified as priorities for the cohort:*

- Theme #1 Bio-based Materials, Training, & Standards
- Theme #2 Land and Housing Stewardship
- Theme #3 Soft Retrofit Measures
- Theme #4 Shared Energy Systems
- Theme #5 Social Contracts in Neighbourhoods
- Theme #6 Housing Archetypes & Retrofit Pathways

*These are examined through the following processes:*

- Peer to peer knowledge exchange sessions
- Deep dive workshops with industry experts
- Site visits

*The outputs generated include:*

- Identification of insights and recommendations for both policy makers and practitioners
- Developments to cohort members projects leading to impact on the ground
- Useful and practical resources that are made publicly available for wider use



# INTRODUCING THE COHORT





## RETROFIT CONNECT 2025: THE COHORT

*Retrofit Connect would not be possible without the deep knowledge, agency, experience and expertise brought to the programme by the Street Demonstrators and Incubators.*

More than the sum of its parts, it illustrates what an ecology of citizens and organisations are capable of when they come together. This programme brings together and platforms innovators, amplifying their work and creating multiplier effects.

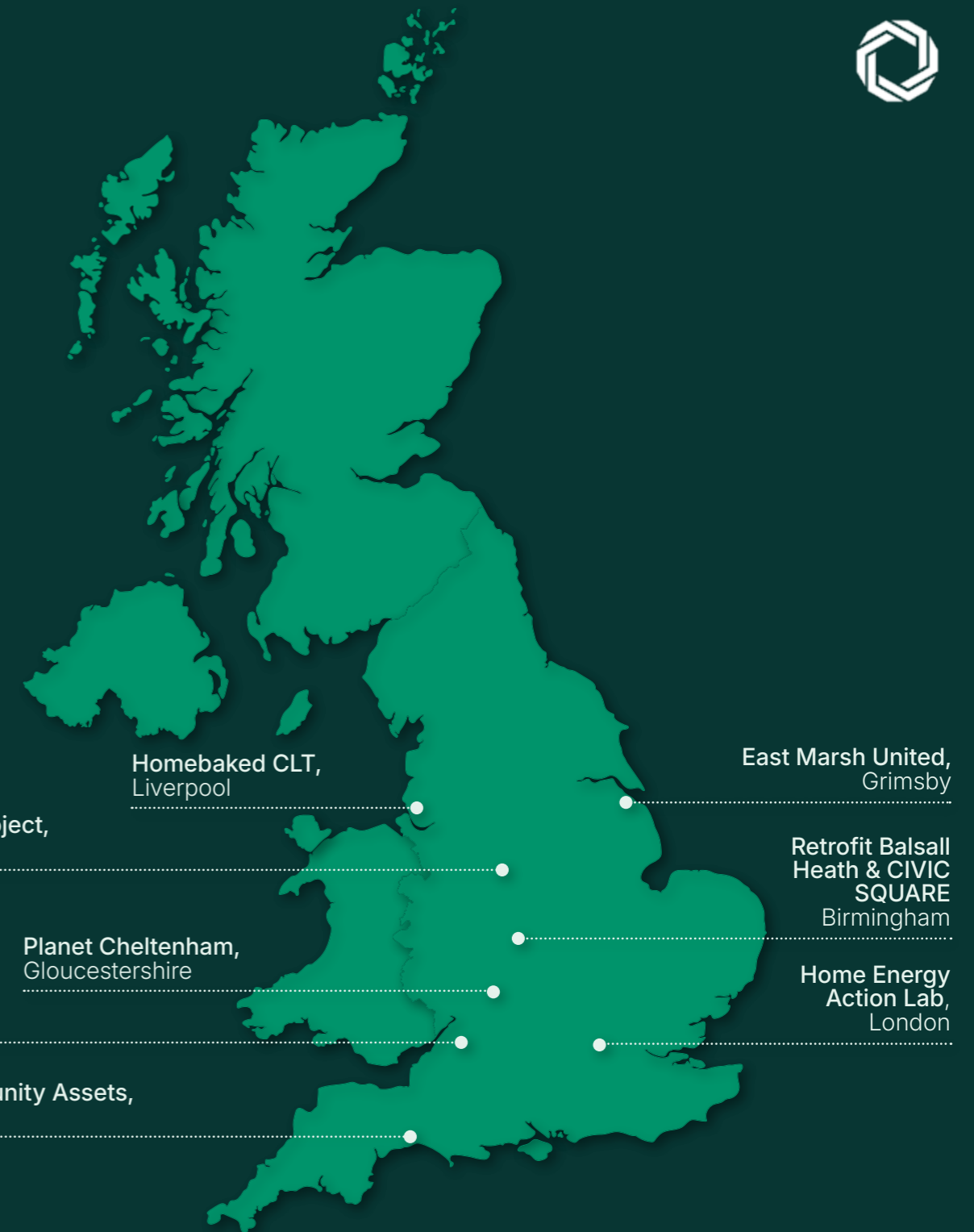
The 2025 cohort are already illustrating what this deep work looks like in practice.



## INCUBATORS AND DEMONSTRATORS

*In this programme there are 6 Street Incubators and 3 Street Demonstrators.*

There is no difference in practice in the programme, all groups participate and are supported equitably. The difference is the external funding structure by which the groups are supported to participate.



### STREET DEMONSTRATORS

- WeCanMake, Bristol
- Retrofit Balsall Heath, Birmingham
- CIVIC SQUARE, Birmingham

### STREET INCUBATORS

- Homebaked CLT, Liverpool
- Portland Inn Project, Stoke-On-Trent
- Planet Cheltenham, Cheltenham
- Wessex Community Assets, Bridport
- East Marsh United, Grimsby
- Home Energy Action Lab, London

## STREET INCUBATORS AT A GLANCE



*East Marsh United*

East Marsh United is a community group dedicated to transforming the East Marsh of Grimsby for the better. Participation in the Retrofit Connect programme is led by Josie Crescent Moon, EMU's ambassador for people and place and Paula Graves, EMU's Community-Led Housing Manager.



*Wessex Community Assets*

Wessex Community Assets is a Community Benefit Society working with the belief that people and their environment are better protected when they have control of their local land, enterprises and services. Co-founder Tim Crabtree is Retrofit Connect's key contact for WCA.



*The Portland Inn Project*

The Portland Inn Project CIC is a creative arts project for a community in Stoke On Trent with an aim to achieve community cohesion, economic, social and cultural development. Co-directors Anna Francis and Rebecca Davies are representing PIPIC in the Retrofit Connect programme.



*Homebaked CLT*

Homebaked Community Land Trust is a community led organisation with a scalable, sustainable and creative approach to community ownership in Anfield and Everton, Liverpool. Homebaked CLT's Rachael Branton and Tom Murphy are participating in Retrofit Connect.



*Planet Cheltenham*

Planet Cheltenham is a Vision 21 initiative offering community climate solutions and support around Gloucestershire. Raechel Kelly represents Planet Cheltenham as part of the Retrofit Connect programme.



*Home Energy Action Lab*

Home Energy Action Lab (HEAL) was established as an outcomes led community benefit society in 2022 by residents of Hackney, North London. Co-founders Dave Powis, Sal Wilson, and Ben Owens are participating in Retrofit Connect.



## STREET DEMONSTRATORS AT A GLANCE



*WeCanMake*

WeCanMake is a community land trust and neighbourhood test-space in Bristol, imagining and making new ways to create homes that build social infrastructure and community wealth. Co-founder Melissa Mean is leading WeCanMake's participation in the Retrofit Connect programme.



*Retrofit Balsall Heath*

Retrofit Balsall Heath is a community benefit society and resident-led movement collaborating to reshape Balsall Heath's homes & streets. Sara Khatun Mia & John Christophers are joint coordinators throughout the Retrofit Connect programme.



*CIVIC SQUARE*

CIVIC SQUARE is a community interest company demonstrating neighbourhood-scale civic infrastructure for social, ecological, economic, and climate transition. Immy Kaur and Brodie Weir are representing CIVIC SQUARE in the programme.



# STREET INCUBATORS

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*Creating healthy neighbourhoods, economic mobility, and ethical community landlording in Grimsby*

### Wessex Community Assets ..... 22

*Taking a bioregional and regenerative approach to local economies, retrofit and community ownership in Bridport and the South West*

### Portland Inn Project .....24

*Integrating arts and culture with community owned assets and retrofit in Stoke-On-Trent*

### Homebaked CLT ..... 26

*Saving community buildings and changing the system in Liverpool*

### Planet Cheltenham ..... 28

*Creating the civic infrastructure for collective solutions in Cheltenham*

### Home Energy Action Lab ..... 30

*Building community-led capacity for equitable retrofit development in London*



## EAST MARSH UNITED, GRIMSBY

*East Marsh United (EMU) founded East Marsh Community, the Community Benefit Society that operates as an ethical landlord. Working in partnership with EMU (now a CIO), it provides wraparound support to tenants and residents. Through this model, the organisation is developing community-led housing solutions in East Marsh.*

EMU's mission is to provide 100 homes for 100 years, encouraging people to flourish through the creation of a green, healthy, beautiful and safe environment. By building relationships within the community, challenging power, and inspiring imagination and through community creativity, EMU is accelerating towards their goals.

*"Everything we do is geared towards changing the face of the East Marsh for good. Building on the East Marsh Neighbourhood Renewal Area action plan commissioned by the council in 2011, we're taking things to the next level with our own wider East Marsh Plan."*

The group has championed community artists, created new opportunities for education and economic mobility, retrofitted homes and improved the neighbourhood. Their advocacy for grassroots democracy has uplifted the voices of many proud East Marshians.



## SPOTLIGHT - AN ETHICAL COMMUNITY LANDLORD



*Amongst their many services, East Marsh United has demonstrated that ethical community landlording is not only possible, but is capable of delivering positive outcomes for residents.*

Through their retrofit programme, EMU renovated several homes in the East Marsh. Properties on Rutland street were refurbished, leading to the creation of jobs and improvements in health for the residents. The provision of secure, high-quality housing had a positive multiplier effect, directly influencing residents' ability to participate in and contribute to the local economy. A healthy home provided the foundations for employment stability, and further civic engagement.



*"The true value of Retrofit Connect isn't just found in the online seminars; it's found on the streets of Grimsby. Having Sara from the National Retrofit Hub walk our neighbourhood was a turning point. She helped us understand that our 'old rendering' wasn't just an aesthetic issue - it was a health issue for the buildings and the people inside them."*

*During our Energy Play Day, the atmosphere was electric. Watching residents' faces light up as they used the thermal cameras to see exactly where their homes could be leaking heat was incredible. It turned a daunting, invisible problem into something we can understand and fix together.*

*Retrofit Connect hasn't just given us the voice and confidence to challenge our local authority on their retrofit funding; it's given us the tools, the confidence, and the expert network to lead our own transition."*

You can learn more about EMU's work [here](#).



## WESSEX COMMUNITY ASSETS, BRIDPORT

*Established in 2003 alongside the Wessex Reinvestment Trust, Wessex Community Assets (WCA) is a community benefit society working to expand community ownership of housing, land and local economies.*

WCA provides enabling support to community-led housing projects, including both new-build and retrofit schemes. Around 60 projects have received support to date, with WCA helping groups to develop governance structures, secure finance and deliver sustainable homes. In 2007, the organisation also helped pioneer community shares as an innovative finance mechanism, and has since supported the registration of around 150 community benefit societies across sectors such as local food, community energy, workspace and textiles.

*"When communities have more control of housing and land, the local economy, natural and built environment and livelihoods are all improved."*

Coordinating the Raise the Roof partnership, WCA promotes innovative construction approaches and the use of natural materials, working with partners including Assemble and the University of Plymouth. In 2024, it collaborated with Dorset Community Energy and People Powered Retrofit to explore a Dorset Retrofit Hub, which is now moving towards delivery.



## SPOTLIGHT - BIOREGIONAL APPROACHES TO RETROFIT & LOCAL ECONOMIES



*Wessex Community Assets are supporting the development of bioregional supply chains and finance which build community wealth and create regenerative landscapes.*

Across the southwest bioregion, WCA has mapped possibilities for timber, hemp and flax to form part of a bio-based material supply chain for construction.

Over the past two years, Wessex Community Assets has worked with a group of West Dorset farmers to trial the cultivation, harvesting, breaking and scutching of flax to produce textile quality yarn. Rebuilding community connection to the land and the heritage of bio-materials, the trials have created opportunities for knowledge sharing and reconnection with traditional practices.

The group has faced challenges such as the absence of local bioregional processing facilities, the lack of skills and knowledge required to work with the processing machinery and the limited and inconsistent demand for UK-grown fibre. These constraints underline the importance of developing distributed, cooperative enterprise models to rebuild a regenerative supply chain. These efforts signal a promising vision where retrofitted homes, local economies, and thriving landscapes are all part of a new regenerative strategy.



You can learn more about Wessex Community Asset's work [here](#).



## PORTLAND INN PROJECT, STOKE ON TRENT

*The Portland Inn Project CIC (PIP/CIC) is a creative arts project for a community in Stoke On Trent with an aim to achieve community cohesion, economic, social and cultural development by involving the community in development of a pioneering community space, cultural hub and social enterprise.*

PIP/CIC runs from the heart of a residential area, home to a diverse community that is largely made up of families who have a deep-rooted history of living and working in the area, including cultures from all over the world. Since transferring the disused pub into community ownership in 2016, the community interest company has worked with residents to shape how it serves families in the Portland Street triangle. PIP's deeply embedded, progressive approach has helped to deliver a collaborative architectural plan and raise significant funding for a pioneering cultural space in the neighbourhood, the first of its kind in the city.

*"We see the building as a demonstrator for a wider neighbourhood renewal, and aim to bring lasting change to our area through the work we do together as a community."*

Where the derelict pub building had become a symbol of neglect, collectively we have turned this around; it is now a symbol of hope for the neighbourhood."

## SPOTLIGHT - INTEGRATING ARTS, CULTURE RETROFIT AND COMMUNITY OWNED ASSETS



*The Portland Inn Project has shown that retrofit is an act of creativity in itself - reimagining a future where our buildings can support bright and dynamic hubs of civic and cultural activity.*

With work beginning in October 2023, PIP/CIC is working towards the renovation of a disused pub building, transferred into community ownership by the council on a 25-year lease. The pub building had fallen into disrepair having been empty and unused for almost ten years until 2016. Once the building's renovation is complete, it will become a much-needed anchor building for the neighbourhood, providing access to ongoing creative, educational & cultural programmes, & opportunities for arts related employability, social enterprise, wellbeing & learning, recognised by Stoke City council as a vital, lynchpin project in the revitalisation of the neighbourhood & the city's wider ecology.



*"Being invited as a Street Incubator as part of the Retrofit Connect project has come at a really perfect time for us, as we move towards the end of our long-term building project to transform a derelict pub building into a creative community space for our neighbourhood. The programme has coincided with a new venture which we have been exploring to try to tackle one of the most challenging problems in our area; the housing injustice our neighbours experience as a result of negligent landlords."*

*We are right at the start of exploring what might change if we were able to set up a Community Land Trust, and so being part of this programme, connecting us to experts from across the country who have been delivering amazing work for many years has turbo boosted our learning and understanding of what might be possible for our neighbourhood."*

You can learn more about PIP/CIC's work [here](#).



## HOMEBAKED CLT, LIVERPOOL

*Homebaked Community Land Trust is a community-led organisation with a scalable, sustainable and creative approach to community ownership.*

*"We are a growing group of people who live, work and regularly visit Anfield and Everton, who have been working together since 2012 to improve things for our community and make our neighbourhood somewhere we can all live well."*

Homebaked CLT begins with a powerful proposition: *What does it mean to live well, now and for future generations?* This means genuinely affordable, healthy, secure, and environmentally friendly homes, good quality jobs, and welcoming spaces to come together, learn and celebrate - not just now, but for generations to come.

The CLT's belief is that together, as local people, communities can shape and own their social, cultural and economic future. The way the CLT works creates the conditions and opportunities to find community-led solutions to meet the neighbourhood's needs and aspirations, through collaboration, creativity, adaptability, bravery and rebuilding pride in place - despite decades of top down regeneration attempts and dispossession.

*"We exist to make Anfield and Everton a vibrant place to live, work and play - a place where we can all live well - through truly community-led grass roots development that keeps land and housing in community ownership, by the people, for the people"*



## SPOTLIGHT - SAVING COMMUNITY BUILDINGS AND BEYOND



*Homebaked CLT has shown that when communities come together to take ownership of an asset, it can begin to build a broader movement.*

Homebaked CLT started by saving their iconic neighbourhood bakery building from demolition, supporting their first business tenant to develop a thriving community business, and creating a shared home for four people. But the community-led transformation the CLT is working to achieve is much bigger than a single home or community business, and instead will be achieved through collective action towards systemic change. The CLT is committed to supporting local ideas, businesses and collectives to flourish, and is working to bring further local buildings into community ownership to develop more affordable homes, business and community spaces with and for its neighbours.

*"Doing this properly is challenging, not least because we work within inequitable systems and structures, with low market values and competition from developers only making it harder. But we remain committed to transforming regeneration in our community, finding ways for more of the money spent locally to stay here."*



*"During a turbulent period for our organisation where our years-long plans have been turned on their head, being a part of this programme has been a centering and grounding force. Not only through practical action such as the letter of support from NRH in support of our bid application, or through sharing new and innovative ideas for other ways that we can work in our locality - e.g. 1:1 modelling of the roof detail at WeCanMake, but by creating a space in which we can draw inspiration, energy and support from other groups who share our collective vision. It is always better to meet people and see places in person as opposed to solely on screen!"*

You can learn more about Homebaked CLT's work [here](#).



## PLANET CHELTENHAM, CHELTENHAM

*Planet Cheltenham is a community-led climate action network and Vision 21 initiative based in Cheltenham, bringing together residents, businesses, schools and local organisations to accelerate the town's response to the climate and ecological emergency.*

Beginning as 15 local residents coming together in early 2020, the group looked at collective solutions to climate change. As a Vision 21 Initiative, Planet Cheltenham created a sustainability centre in Cheltenham for the whole community to use and engage in local solutions. Planet Cheltenham's Community Climate Hub opened early in 2026.

Secondly, the group is delivering and developing a number of community based activities and solutions to help raise awareness of the dangers of climate change and to offer locally based answers to challenging issues. Planet Cheltenham is a connector, convenor, and catalyst, building connections between members of the community.

Since 2020, Planet Cheltenham has hosted a number of inspiring projects and groups including a Doughnut Economics Learning Journey, Climate Changemakers, Youth Climate Group and most recently the Future Fit Homes cohort. Over 60 residents took part, leading to 74 retrofit actions and a community of support that is still reaching new people.



## SPOTLIGHT - CREATING COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE



*By creating a sustainability centre through the retrofit of an existing building, Planet Cheltenham is illustrating how third spaces are integral to civic infrastructure.*

*"We have museums to showcase the past, we need spaces to practice the future."*

Planet Cheltenham identified and bought a suitable building to transform into their sustainability centre. After raising money, the group transformed an old storehouse into 'The Greenhouse,' a modern, two-story activity hub. With a community space, a kitchen, and workspace - the building is powered by solar pv. batteries, air to air heat pumps and has rainwater harvesting.

*"The building has grown out of 30 years of sustained collective action from people across Gloucestershire through repair cafes, community gardens, youth empowerment, and more - led by*



*"Being part of the Retrofit Connect cohort has provided a vital stepping stone for us to collaborate and learn from other retrofit projects across the UK and get a sense of the possible directions that Future Fit Homes can follow. It has expanded our organisational capacity to continue learning and developing our approach and what our role can be in empowering communities to take a more hands-on approach to the retrofit of their homes. In practical terms it has also led to sharing of resources (thank you WeCanMake for our recycled plastic splashback for our new building!)"*

*Hearing from other projects about the progress and pitfalls along their journeys and the crucial discussions around land, housing and emerging models for retrofit has changed our sense of what might be possible in our town. Being part of Retrofit Connect has strengthened our knowledge and understanding around retrofit. But more importantly, it has strengthened our relationship with other organisations working towards a common goal."*

You can learn more about Planet Cheltenham's work [here](#).



## HOME ENERGY ACTION LAB, LONDON

*Home Energy Action Lab (HEAL) was established as a community benefit society in 2022 by residents of Hackney, North London.*

*"At Home Energy Action Lab (HEAL), our work centres on supporting communities to meaningfully shape retrofit strategies. Creating space for learning, collaboration and shared problem-solving around home energy improvements is critical. Retrofit Connect has complemented our work by giving us space to step back and reflect on how we approach community participation and partnership-building."*

HEAL is working towards the democratisation of knowledge, empowering self-organising local groups with the skills, knowledge and tools to support each other in improving the comfort and performance of their homes and neighbourhoods. The team are creating the infrastructure for collective community-led action by building literacy, trust, confidence and motivation for positive change; and by signposting best practice, education, training and professional development.

*"Our vision is for an ever-growing network of local groups actively engaged in supporting the retrofit of their neighbourhood buildings in order to improve health and comfort, strengthen community governance, as well as reduce energy demand and decarbonise heat."*



## SPOTLIGHT - FINDING THE FUN IN RETROFIT



*Home Energy Action Lab takes a deliberately fun, hands-on approach to helping people understand, and get excited about, retrofit.*

HEAL's growing engagement toolkit brings neighbours together through playful, accessible activities including games, thermal imaging street walks and film screenings, that spark curiosity and collective learning about home energy improvements.

By supporting place-based community groups to use these tools to start retrofit conversations in their neighbourhoods, HEAL turns what can feel like a technical, overwhelming topic into something social, creative and empowering. This joyful, relatable style is core to HEAL's identity, making retrofit feel possible, communal and even enjoyable.

Recognising that real change in our neighbourhoods depends on an energised, connected movement, HEAL takes inspiration from Toni Cade Bambara's reminder that "the role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible," shaping retrofit engagement that feels joyful, inviting and impossible to ignore.



*"Through the Retrofit Connect programme, we've broadened our thinking, built new relationships and strengthened existing ones. It has been inspirational to hear about how other organisations approach participation and collaboration. Being part of such a motivated and generous community has reaffirmed our direction, built our confidence, and reminded us of the strength that comes from shared knowledge and collective ambition"*

You can learn more about HEAL's work [here](#).



# STREET DEMONSTRATORS

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*Creating a neighbourhood test-space and empowering the trades in Bristol*

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*Delivering inclusive cross-tenure, whole street retrofit and connecting communities in Birmingham*

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*Transforming the neighbourhood and stewarding civic infrastructure in Birmingham*



## WECANMAKE, BRISTOL

*WeCanMake is a community land trust and neighbourhood test-space in Bristol, imagining and making new ways to create homes that build social infrastructure and community wealth.*

The initiative emerged as a people-led response to the housing crisis. As a community land trust, WeCanMake creates affordable homes using micro-sites in big back gardens and in between buildings.

*"Our neighbourhood test-space shows that through creative community-driven innovation, it is possible to seed change within the current system."*

Nothing WeCanMake has done has required new policy or regulation. Within existing frameworks, they have created a new supply of land, established new routes through the planning system and developed ways to diversify and localise the production of new homes, placing them where people want and need them most.

WeCanMake shows how communities and neighbourhoods can open up different routes to scale and impact: where aggregate numbers are realised through multiple, distributed and diverse communities using a common set of tools and methods to deliver development on their own terms.



## SPOTLIGHT - CREATING A NEIGHBOURHOOD RETROFIT TEST-SPACE AND EMPOWERING THE TRADES



*With their Neighbourhood Trade Crew, WeCanMake is demonstrating how employing local residents and trades people from underrepresented groups in construction can keep the value of retrofit circulating within the neighbourhood.*

WeCanMake collected information about 6 homes on Andover Road, creating a 'retrofit recipe' for the street. Working with residents, the community land trust is trialling new ways of working together as a community and designing retrofit solutions in some of the oldest and leakiest homes in the region.



### WeCanMake Playbook

This Playbook sets out WeCanMake's working prototype for unlocking micro-sites for affordable community-led homes, and shares how the approach could be replicated and scaled across the UK.

### WeCanMake Short Film

This documentary short film is a story about what community and place-led innovation looks like. Meet housing pioneering residents John, Toni and Bill, and hear about how the WeCanMake model works on the ground, and how it could be scaled and replicated by other communities across the country.

You can learn more about WeCanMake's work [here](#).



## RETROFIT BALSALL HEATH, BIRMINGHAM

*Retrofit Balsall Heath (RBH) is a Community Benefit Society and a bold, resident-led movement reshaping our neighbourhood from the ground up.*

Born from grassroots determination and built on the combined deep local knowledge of partners including MECC Trust, Bahu Trust and volunteers, Retrofit Balsall Heath is helping to pioneer a just and community-led transition to a low-carbon future - one home, one street, and one conversation at a time.

*"Our vision is simple yet transformative: empower the people who live here to lead the green transition. In a sector often dominated by large contractors and top-down decisions, we're proving there's a better way - where residents co-design retrofit solutions, shape governance, and share in the benefits of cleaner, warmer homes and greener streets."*

With support from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Retrofit Balsall Heath has grown from a passionate volunteer collective into a recognised force for climate justice. The movement has built strong partnerships leading to the development of a formal CBS governance structure. The group have never lost sight of their values: working towards inclusion with "no-one left behind", trust, collaboration, and community ownership.



## SPOTLIGHT - DELIVERING CROSS-TENURE, WHOLE STREET RETROFIT, AND CONNECTING COMMUNITIES



*Having retrofitted 650 homes within Balsall Heath in collaboration with MECC Trust and a coalition of community groups, Retrofit Balsall Heath has shown the possibilities that inclusive retrofit and collective action can achieve.*

Using Birmingham City Council "Warmer Homes" funding, the partial retrofit measures (2023) averaged £10K per home. This included insulation, solar PV, windows/doors and ventilation. Retrofit Balsall Heath, MECC and partners accelerated take-up of the scheme through community-led outreach, vastly in excess of similar local authority results in the past, and successfully campaigned to remove household income criteria.

An alliance of trusted existing faith and community groups invited sign-ups, through word-of-mouth, WhatsApp groups, street-by-street door knocking, local radio & media, Balsall Heath Carnival, and multiple community meetings and meals, experimenting with local street champions outreach and liaison.



### A Whole Street Retrofit Demonstrator

*"Working with every household on a single street including housing associations, private landlords, tenants and homeowners, this project has already repaired unsafe paths and walls, planted fruit and nut trees, fixed compost bins, created colourful street furniture, trained new cyclists, and installed rooftop solar PV and new windows and doors. Current work includes fabric insulation using hemp and woodfibre, ventilation, community PV with batteries, and heat pumps with compact thermal stores. Through resident sessions and tailored Home Energy Plans, the project is demonstrating how community-led, whole-street retrofit can become a transformative, scalable model for other neighbourhoods."*

You can learn more about Retrofit Balsall Heath's work [here](#).



## CIVIC SQUARE, BIRMINGHAM

*CIVIC SQUARE is a Birmingham-based Community Interest Company demonstrating neighbourhood-scale civic infrastructure for social, ecological, economic and climate transition.*

After more than 10 years of organising in Birmingham, CIVIC SQUARE is now co-building Neighbourhood Public Square as a live demonstrator. The project reorients development and construction towards regenerative civic infrastructure at the heart of neighbourhoods.

Working with local people and partners, the organisation is rethinking land stewardship, finance and governance. It is advancing ecological building design and bio-based material retrofit, while helping build the infrastructure needed for wider built environment transition.

Rooted in place, CIVIC SQUARE is openly testing and sharing new models of public goods that respond to the challenges facing neighbourhoods today and in the future, as part of a wider ecosystem of connected movements at local, national and global scales.



## SPOTLIGHT - TRANSFORMING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND STEWARDING CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

C I V I  
C S Q  
U A R E

*Retrofit House sits within CIVIC SQUARE's Neighbourhood Transitions demonstrator, a strand of work exploring how whole-street, community-led retrofit can become a living example of the shifts we need at neighbourhood, city and national scales.*

Building on deep prototyping on Link Road, the project shows what it means for streets to move into the "ecological safety and social justice" space of Doughnut Economics, shifting from individual home upgrades to collective design, governance and financing rooted in the social fabric of place.

This approach recognises that decarbonisation alone isn't enough: we need to move beyond piecemeal technical fixes towards whole-home and whole-street transformations that improve air quality, biodiversity, soil health and community wellbeing. All the technology exists, but the real power lies in how neighbours organise, imagine and act together. Neighbourhood Transitions brings these layers together: participation, systems thinking, shared knowledge and distributed agency, to create a bold, joyful and democratic transition held in common with the community, and capable of inspiring other streets to follow.



### 3°C Neighbourhood

3°C Neighbourhood is co-authored by CIVIC SQUARE and Dark Matter Labs as a new piece of research that seeks to understand the current risks UK urban neighbourhoods face over this century due to climate and ecological breakdown under a high emissions scenario, the likely result of which will be a rise in average global temperature of 3°C.



### Endowing the Future

Endowing The Future is co-authored by CIVIC SQUARE and Dark Matter Labs as a call to philanthropy to meet the moment, endowing its resources, possibilities, assets and imagination not only to avert the worst of current trajectories, but to seed just, regenerative, and distributive futures that can invite the wisdom, creativity, energy and drive of us all.

You can learn more about CIVIC SQUARE's work [here](#).



# INSIGHTS FROM THE COHORT





*Research shows that when people imagine alternatives together, they build resilience and the ability to respond to crisis, especially when systems and institutions are failing.*

## WHY COMMUNITY RETROFIT MATTERS



The ethos of Retrofit Connect is built from the ground up, taking a shared approach, rather than being predefined and delivered to participants. Conversations among the programme's first cohort revealed that community-led retrofit and place-based work is important because:

- **RETROFIT IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BROADER TRANSFORMATION**  
To date, approaches have been largely linear and technocratic, narrowly focused on specific measures, often overlooking broader environmental, social, and systemic contexts. A more holistic, people-centred approach could transform retrofit from a technical fix into a catalyst for lasting social, environmental, and community change.
- **RETROFIT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE**  
Much of the current retrofit industry is shaped and designed by data sets and sectors which are often disconnected from the lived experiences of citizens, and their relationships to their homes. Place-based and community-led retrofit initiatives allow citizens to identify what matters to them and become agents who are capable of profoundly shaping their own neighborhoods.
- **RETROFIT SHOULD BE REGENERATIVE BY DESIGN, REDISTRIBUTING AGENCY TOWARDS CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES**  
There is a shared concern that the current system risks reproducing existing inequities which often benefit dominant market players including large energy companies and consultancy firms while missing the chance to regenerate local skills, knowledge, and wealth. The idea, and evidence, that communities themselves can design, own, and govern retrofit work is a recurring and inspiring theme that underpins Retrofit Connect.



## THE RETROFIT COMMUNITY OF INDUSTRY

*This initiative expands the idea of “community” in retrofit beyond neighbourhood groups to include the industry itself as a collaborative network.*

The Retrofit Community of Industry connects professionals and organisations across design, finance, policy, delivery, and innovation to support real, community-led retrofit projects. Your support can help remove barriers, share learning, and make collective equitable progress toward improving homes, tackling fuel poverty, and addressing the climate crisis, collectively.



*You can help to turn knowledge and expertise into immediate, practical action that accelerates retrofit outcomes and benefits local people by joining the Retrofit Community of Industry:*

- Provide your expertise at one of the programmes technical clinics
- Use the community of industry to fund the programme or provide financial support
- Create partnerships with community-led retrofit initiatives

To find out more details, follow this [link](#).

# JOIN THE RETROFIT COMMUNITY OF INDUSTRY



## REFERENCES & SOURCES

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4. The Portland Inn Project: <https://www.theportlandinnproject.com/>
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6. Planet Cheltenham: <https://planetcheltenham.org/>
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9. Retrofit Balsall Heath: <https://www.retrofitbalsallheath.org/>
10. CIVIC SQUARE: <https://civicsquare.cc/>