

A stylized, colorful face logo consisting of two large eyes (one green, one blue), a small orange nose, and a red mouth with white teeth.

OPUS
REVIEW 2020



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David Edwards

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Executive Summary

2020 has presented a series of unique, unprecedented challenges. This review tells the story of Opus over the past 12 months - from providing an initial, emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic, to developing an ambitious framework for the organisation’s future, focusing on how our work can contribute to a better, fairer society.

Opus is an independent ‘think and do tank’ based in the UK. We have spent the last 10 years building a portfolio of work around platforms that enable diverse voices to be heard and progressive ideas to be discussed. Our work has embraced citizen journalism via Now Then magazine, hosted discussions through the Festival of Debate, promoted independent business and the arts and music sectors through our distribution network, and shared lived, personal experience through Wordlife events.

When the pandemic hit, the collective action from individuals, groups and organisations was inspiring, but there was an urgent need to address critical gaps in the response and to adapt other elements of our work to this new and uncertain context. By Autumn 2020 we had:

- Developed an online map on the Now Then App to help people locate Covid-19 support resources as these emerged across the city.

- Taken over the communications role for both Citizens Advice Sheffield and the newly formed VCS Hubs group led by Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS).
- Re-created the 2020 Festival of Debate as a successful online event, reaching over 40,000 people.
- Developed an international network of citizen-led groups advocating for a Universal Basic Income pilot in response to the pandemic.
- Developed a proposal (with DINA and Union St) to transform the Leah’s Yard building into an innovative community enterprise and cultural hub.
- Produced content for Marketing Sheffield’s Make Yourself At Home campaign, celebrating resilience and renewal by independent traders and the arts and voluntary sectors.

Covid-19 has exacerbated the deep cracks already existing in our society – inequality, poverty, and a failing welfare system - but at the same time we saw a spontaneous collective response to support the most vulnerable in our community. 2020 also saw the global spread of community activism with the Black Lives Matter movement highlighting the impact of systemic racism, and ongoing activism around the climate crisis.

When the pandemic first emerged, our response was to take whatever emergency action was required. However, as the year progressed it became apparent that Opus’s future direction needed to move beyond firefighting and focus on the more foundational changes required to achieve a fairer, more resilient and sustainable society.

Therefore as 2020 draws to a close, we have decided to organise Opus’s projects and activities under seven areas where we want to support and campaign for structural change:

- Electoral reform and local democracy
- Income redistribution and the local economy.
- Anti racism and marginalised voices.
- Promoting and collectivising independent media.
- Climate action
- Not for profit structures
- Narratives of change

Alongside these changes we are also re-purposing our membership programme for organisations and individuals, so that together we can develop and invest in projects which show our mutual commitment to a ‘better’ city and society.

This is the story of our year.

“SO – HOW WAS 2020 FOR YOU?”

2020 in Sheffield

In January 2020, Opus was heading into the new year with a plan based around the organisation’s existing portfolio of work (Now Then Magazine and App, the Festival of Debate, Wordlife, Opus Distribution, and the Universal Basic Income Lab).

However, it turned out that 2020 had other ideas...

As the number of coronavirus cases rose rapidly, Sheffield’s economy was largely shut down for months at a time. Local independent traders, who Opus have supported and promoted for many years, were particularly hard hit. As a consequence many, much loved establishments have had to close their doors, some permanently.

The impacts on Sheffield’s arts and music scene were even more devastating. Sheffield’s theatres have been shut since March, as have the city’s live music venues. Many musicians and artists were self-employed and were excluded from the furlough safety net.

By December 2020 over 600 people had died in Sheffield from coronavirus, whilst the economic impact of the pandemic, and the inadequacies of our benefit system, saw ever more individuals and families suffering financial hardship. Wages in Sheffield are significantly lower than the national average, and this was reflected in the growing dependence on food banks. At one point during the year, one in every 150 households in Sheffield was receiving emergency food support.

“SHEFFIELD HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN AS A REGION WHERE WAGES ARE SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE”

***Julie Roberts, S2
Food Bank***
“We were seeing four times the number of people come through the door in one day than we usually saw in a week before lockdown.”



S6 FOOD BANK, SHEFFIELD



GEORGE MONBIOT

REWILDING THE WORLD

With three months notice the 2020 Festival of Debate was changed to an online programme, with 32 live streamed events, 18 specially-commissioned short form pieces of content and over 130 individual speakers, reaching an audience of over 40,000 unique views.

NOW THEN

ROBERT PROCH | BRADLEY GARRETT | GRAVENHURST
A MAGAZINE FOR SHEFFIELD | ISSUE 81 | FREE

...ed as an artist?
...remember. However, I think one of the major inspirations to
...me as a child were the satirical cartoons in the newspapers my
...father read. The way a cartoonist could undermine and ridicule
...politicians so cleverly really showed me how powerful art could be.
**Is printing an important part of the process for you? Do you
design with printing in mind?**
Yes, very much so. I first started screen printing in my final
.....
“ART AND SCIENCE
.....
year at uni
it's

2020 – IMPACT ON OPUS

Two major elements of Opus’s income generation are through local traders paying for advertising in Now Then magazine and Opus’s distribution service, placing magazines and flyers in locations across the region. The lockdown that started in March cut off both sources of revenue overnight. Wordlife and Opus music events were all cancelled, and nine months on there is still no sense of when these will be able to restart safely.

In the face of all this uncertainty our first priority was the welfare of our team. We had a series of open conversations about how we could best look after each other, what we could realistically do over the coming months and how we could achieve this. Working from home was introduced and the furlough scheme meant that we could retain our team even when some of our work streams were on hold.

Since 2015, Opus has coordinated the Festival of Debate, a platform co-created by communities in Sheffield to discuss the key social, economic and political issues of the day. The 2020 event was planned to be our most ambitious yet with 130 events in locations across the city region, with topics ranging from the green economy to combating racism, and speakers including George Monbiot, Kate Pickett, Gary Younge, David Lammy and Natalie Bennett. After nine months of preparation, the programme that we had been planning for the 2020 Festival was no longer viable.

The Festival of Debate was repurposed as an online event, which meant acquiring both the technical and presentational skills required to deliver this. The results exceeded our wildest expectations.

Continuing with Now Then as a print magazine was no longer viable. Fortunately we had already been planning an upgrade for the Now Then website, so this and the Now Then App became our main platforms for the rest of the year.

OUR NEW WEBSITE WWW.NOWTHENMAGAZINE.COM HAS ACHIEVED AN AUDIENCE OF 15,000 UNIQUE VISITORS A MONTH SINCE ITS LAUNCH IN JULY 2020.

RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS

The collective response to the pandemic at a local level was truly inspirational as informal groups and established agencies worked together to protect and support the most vulnerable members of our community. Over the last decade Opus has developed a strong network of relationships with the voluntary and community sector (VCS), so when the pandemic hit, we were already in regular contact with key agencies.

Our conversations with Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS) highlighted a critical issue around signposting. With so many new informal initiatives emerging, and with established agencies like food banks having to change their ways of working to reflect Covid-19 restrictions, it was hard for individuals and organisations to know where and how to access support.

Alongside this work we also took on a contract providing general communications support for the VCS Hubs group which VAS coordinated, with key messages disseminated via Now Then's platforms and the local press.

Citizens Advice Sheffield (CAS) was another agency at the heart of the voluntary sector's response. CAS was facing a significant increase in demand for its services whilst also having to transition to a Covid-safe model of working, and did not have either the resources or skillset to communicate these changes.



OUR WORK MAPPING INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES WITHIN THE CITY ENABLED US TO EXTEND THIS TO THE CITY-WIDE COVID-19 RESPONSE. 110 COMMUNITY RESOURCES WERE LISTED, WITH THE MAP AVAILABLE ON THE NOW THEN APP AND VAS'S WEBSITE.

In March 2020, Opus agreed to provide a comprehensive communications service to Citizens Advice Sheffield, ensuring that people knew how to access the agency's advice services, and maintaining the visibility and presence of CAS across local press and social media.



“WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER” – WELL, ACTUALLY, WE’RE NOT...

A Year of Inequality and Social Activism

One of the early clichés arising from the pandemic was that everyone was equally affected by Covid-19. However, as the year progressed it became increasingly apparent that the pandemic’s impact was felt disproportionately by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups – those on benefits and low wages, the elderly (particularly those in care homes), Sheffield’s ethnically diverse communities, tenants in poor quality, overcrowded accommodation, and those working in public facing roles.

At the same time, the societal structures that were supposed to support the vulnerable members of the community manifestly failed. Benefits were not paid, staff in care homes and hospitals were left without PPE and a national, top down approach to managing the pandemic only served to highlight the need for effective local democracy.

Black Lives Matter and the Climate Crisis

In May 2020 an African American man, George Floyd, was killed by an American policeman. The incident, captured on video, triggered widespread protests, not only across American cities but globally. The Black Lives Matter movement highlighted the ongoing issue of systemic racism and its impact on people of colour across all areas of society.

2020 was also one of the hottest years on record, with clear evidence of irreversible changes in the ecological balance of the planet. Extinction Rebellion and other environmental groups continued to campaign for the radical changes required to meet the scale of this challenge.

At the onset of the pandemic, Opus’s focus was on emergency action, but it became evident that fire-fighting was not enough. 2020 has shown us that radical change is needed, but for change to last this has to happen at a structural level.

Opus has always held the core belief that we can live in a place where everyone works to make things better for each other. ‘Better’ to us means fair, diverse, accessible, independent and heard. We have always had these values – given the challenges of 2020, we want to be clear about how these values power and shape our work.

A combination of poverty, poor housing and ethnicity resulted in some local communities having an infection rate five times higher than neighbouring areas.

“Time to head upstream...”

There is a parable about a group of friends who are walking by a river bank and see a baby drowning in the river. They dive in to save the drowning baby, but as soon as they save one drowning baby - another one appears. The friends are very busy saving drowning babies until one friend gets out of the river and begins walking upstream.

“Where are you going?” shout the friends in the river, still saving drowning babies.

“I’m going upstream” she replies.

The friends are aghast, “Come and help save the drowning babies” they say. “What could be more important than drowning babies?”

The friend replies, “I’m heading upstream to find out who is throwing babies in the river.”

For Opus it is now time to head upstream...

As 2020 comes to an end, we are focusing more explicitly on how our work can support and contribute to the real changes that we want to see in society. Following extensive discussions within the team, we have identified seven key areas where we want to contribute – either through our existing projects or by developing new initiatives.



ELECTORAL REFORM AND LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Trust in political institutions is at an all-time low. From recent surveys, almost 60% of people feel that their views are not represented in British politics today and only 18% said they trust political parties to “do what is right”. This disenchantment has had a significant impact on democratic engagement.

Yet, over the last nine months, we have seen unparalleled levels of active citizenship at a community level.

IN 2019 ONLY 31.2% OF THE ELECTORATE VOTED IN THE SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL ELECTION.

It is clear that the pandemic has revealed the capacity for neighbourliness and civic action lying latent in the population, and both Sheffield City Council and local citizens have shown interest in exploring models which augment representative democracy processes and empower local communities.

Since 2015, Opus has been active in encouraging and enhancing democratic engagement through the Festival of Debate. We are now looking to take this further and are consulting with key stakeholders regarding a pilot based around the ‘Citizen Hubs’ model.

WHAT ARE CITIZEN HUBS?

Citizen Hubs are community-based, community-led spaces which host and facilitate a wide range of democratic discussions using a variety of formats. The views of citizens are brought together and are then inputted into the decision-making processes of the Local Authority and other decision-makers. The outcomes are then fed back to citizens via the Hubs and other civil society partners.



FIR VALE COMMUNITY HUB
FESTIVAL OF DEBATE 2019

- Citizen Hubs are designed to enhance and complement the existing system of representative democracy. The model would be led and co-designed by the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in partnership with the Local Authority and other civil society organisations. The VCS is key to this approach given its ability to reach and engage citizens from all walks of life and, crucially, to be genuinely trusted by them.
 - The Citizen Hub model is adaptable to the particular needs of individual local communities. The model uses a ‘menu’ of deliberative options including citizen assemblies, interactive digital spaces, creative interactions with GP surgeries, libraries and schools, ballot boxes and on-the-ground engagement, with the exact mix determined by individual hubs.
 - Citizen Hubs would be based on local authority wards but deliberations would commonly take place at a more localised, neighbourhood level (approximately 5,000 people). Citizen Hubs will also need to connect with communities of interest and specific lived experience, as well as those of geography.
 - Data will be collated and analysed before being submitted to the Local Authority, with this work undertaken by a central VCS team. Data will be a mix of quantitative and qualitative, and collation and presentation methods need to reflect this.
- Over the coming months, in collaboration with key stakeholders, we will be developing a detailed proposal for a Citizen Hub pilot in an area of Sheffield and we will be seeking funding for this work.

INCOME REDISTRIBUTION AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

UBI LAB NETWORK IS THE FIRST AND BIGGEST CITIZEN-LED GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT FOR BASIC INCOME IN THE UK. WE HAVE A RECORD OF HOSTING SUCCESSFUL EVENTS, FROM PUBLIC SPEAKERS TO FULL-DAY CONFERENCES.

One clear outcome of 2020 is that our current economic system is broken. Inequality has been growing steadily over the past decades, and the Covid-19 pandemic has just served to reinforce these trends. In one of the wealthiest countries in the world:

- Over 1.2 million food parcels were distributed by food banks between April and September 2020, an increase of 140% over the past 5 years.
- There are 4.2 million children living in poverty.
- Over 5.7 million people are now receiving Universal Credit, with 38% of this group in paid employment.

Since 2016, Opus has been promoting the concept of a Universal Basic Income, a regular and unconditional cash payment to every individual, as an alternative to the current benefits system which is too complex, too inflexible and leaves many recipients in extreme poverty.

Although the initial focus was on Sheffield, Opus with support from the Centre for Welfare Reform has subsequently facilitated and incubated the UBI Lab Network, with a membership of 36 citizen led Labs across the UK and beyond. The network has been established to collectively advocate for basic income pilots and the need to test policy alternatives to current social security systems. Opus provides dedicated staff time to support this network.

In collaboration with Basic Income Conversation, powered by Compass, we've also been working with Baroness Natalie Bennett, Beth Winter MP, Ronnie Cowan MP, Cllr Patrick Brown Cllr, Cllr Alison Teal and Christine Jardine MP to develop a new hybrid model for an All-Party Parliamentary Group, engaging regionally and nationally elected representatives and other stakeholders with the wider debate around UBI and social security.

I wrote to Rishi Sunak calling on him to back Basic Income trials

Co-sign the letter now

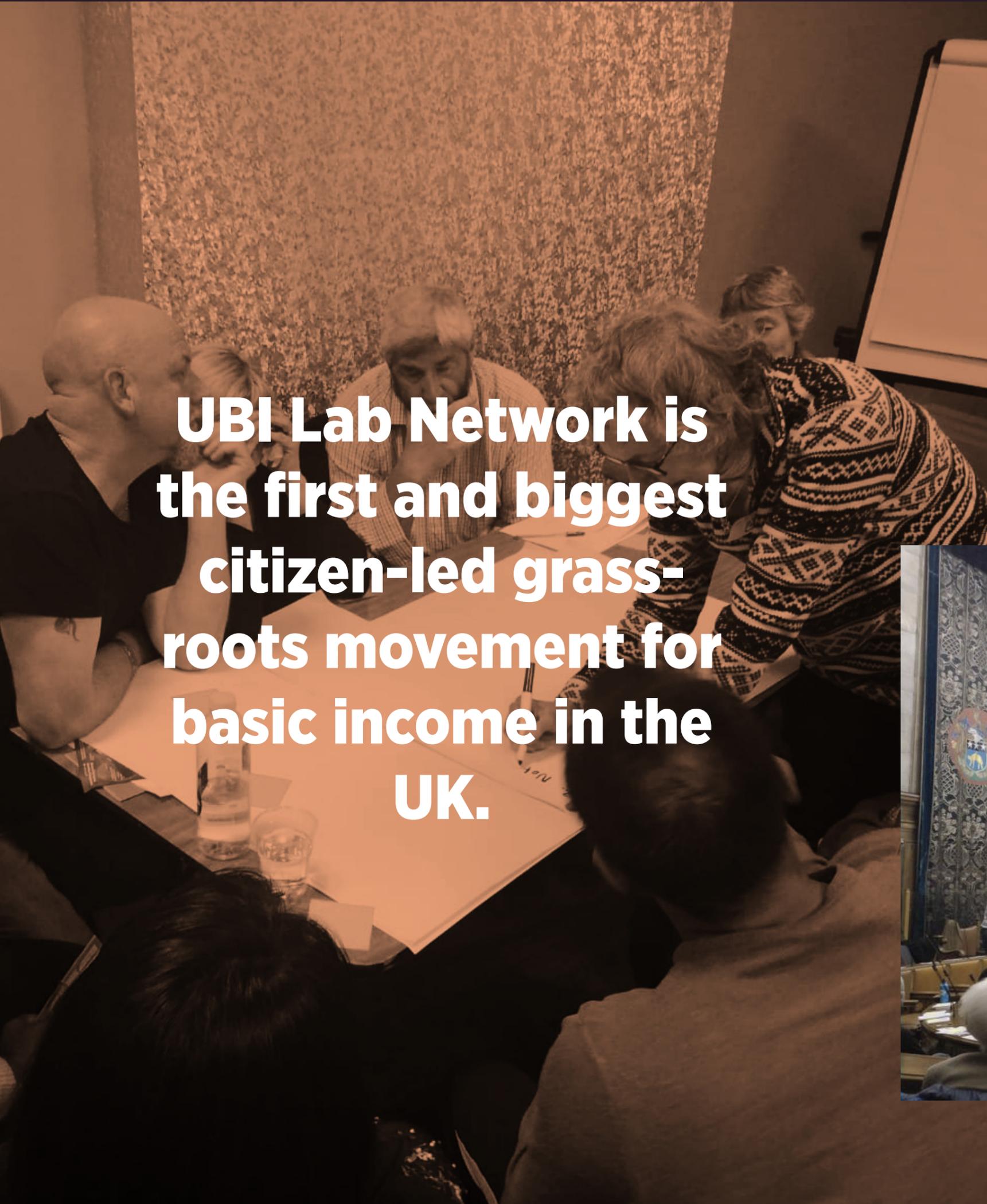


UBI LAB NETWORK

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As the economic impact of the pandemic hit home, the UBI Lab Network developed a number of proposals including: As the economic impact of the pandemic hit home, the UBI Lab Network developed a number of proposals, actions and resources including:

- An emergency UBI during the Covid 19 pandemic
- A recovery UBI for the post-pandemic revival
- UBI for Northern Ireland
- UBI+ for people with a disability
- UBI as a peace dividend for Northern Ireland
- FAQ's & Summary of Evidence from pilots
- How to pass a Council Motion resource
- In collaboration with Basic Income Conversation (BIC) & Organise An interactive map, illustrating 17,000 testimonials from the public on UBI
- Worked with 13 councils to pass motions in support of piloting a UBI
- In collaboration with BIC & Basic Income UK, a mayoral candidate pledge for 2021 elections



UBI Lab Network is the first and biggest citizen-led grassroots movement for basic income in the UK.

Supporting the local economy

Spending money with local businesses is a key factor in strengthening local economies.

For the last decade Opus has been supporting and marketing local independent traders, through our various platforms. The lockdown in March 2020 was catastrophic for many of these businesses and our immediate response was to offer free support with publicity and marketing, as well as cancelling yearly advertising contracts and offering 'pay as you can' invoicing to smaller traders.

Opus's other initiatives included:

- Convening a roundtable which enabled local businesses and community and arts organisations to discuss the challenges of responding to the pandemic.
- Supporting the Make Yourself At Home campaign launched by Marketing Sheffield to promote resilience and recovery. We have published articles and videos on the Now Then platforms looking at post-pandemic recovery for the arts sector, local business and community organisations.

FOR EVERY POUND SPENT WITH A LOCAL BUSINESS, ON AVERAGE 70P REMAINS IN THE LOCALITY, COMPARED TO AN EQUIVALENT FIGURE OF 5P FOR MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES.



**Sheffield City Council
Passing a motion to support a UBI trial**

ANTI-RACISM AND MARGINALISED VOICES

The death of George Floyd in May 2020 and the global spread of the Black Lives Matter movement saw an international outcry against the pervasive racism which continues to disfigure societies across the world. Black people continue to suffer a systemic level of discrimination whether in relation to income, employment, housing, wellbeing or the criminal justice system. At the same time the history of western societies has minimised both the impact of slavery and colonialism, and the positive contributions of people of colour.

At Opus we are all too aware of the work we ourselves have to do, both in terms of diversifying our staff team and boards, and in expanding the range of voices heard through our platforms. We are committed to this task, to listening, to learning and to making a real and lasting change. As a first step, during 2020 we sought a more diverse membership for the Opus governance boards by recruiting 6 new members.

As well as making internal changes, we also want to reflect our commitment to anti-racism in the projects that we choose to develop, but as a currently predominantly white organisation, we are mindful of the danger of engaging in issues where we do not have a lived experience. We had the opportunity to consider these issues in more depth when we were approached by Melissa Simmonds, who runs a Sheffield-based organisation called MisTaught. Melissa asked us to support an online presentation and Q&A session, titled 'Black History Month for Dummies and White Teachers', following on from an event we ran with her during Festival of Debate 2019. Working with Melissa was a very useful learning process for us. We subsequently partnered with Learn Sheffield to create 10 pieces of written content and 3 videos to support Black History Month, and we also refocused elements of the Festival of Debate programme to engage directly with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Tackling Racism in the Leadership Pipeline

More recently we have provided financial sponsorship, marketing (including a promotional & whole conference archive film) and social media support for the 'Tackling Racism in the Leadership Pipeline' conference led by Dr Muna Abdi. There is a stark under-representation of the city's ethnically diverse communities on the governance boards of public, private, community and voluntary organisations in Sheffield.

Following-up from this conference, Opus has collaborated with VAS to author a development bid to the Talbot Trust to explore a project supporting boards that are looking to diversify their memberships, whilst also supporting the development of a pipeline where people of colour are encouraged to consider sitting on these boards and are provided with appropriate training and ongoing support.

The work will be undertaken and accountable to a group of anti-racist organisations and organisations led by people of colour. The project will be co-managed by Voluntary Action Sheffield and Opus and we have been supported in this work by Dr Muna Abdi and Rob Cotterell, Chair of Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association.

While the proportion of Sheffield's population who are not white is nearing 25%, the representation of those individuals and communities on leadership and governance boards in the city is less than 4%.



Tackling Racism Across the Leadership Pipeline

IN SHEFFIELD

Friday 4th September
CONFERENCE: 10AM-2PM
ACTION PLANNING: 3-5PM



KEYNOTE SPEAKER
PROFESSOR
LAURA SERRANT OBE



PROGRAMME

- ▶ LEADERSHIP PANEL DISCUSSION
- ▶ BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS
- ▶ YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES



Register here:

Sponsors



PROMOTING AND COLLECTIVISING INDEPENDENT MEDIA

THIS YEAR OPUS HAS PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN ESTABLISHING 'NEWS CLUB UK', BRINGING TOGETHER INDEPENDENT MEDIA OUTLETS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

There is a significant democratic deficit in the UK as a result of the concentration of media ownership. Just three companies dominate 83% of the national newspaper market, up from 71% in 2015. The gatekeeping of what is considered newsworthy and the range of 'acceptable' views are becoming ever narrower, with an agenda driven by multinational conglomerates linked to specific political and commercial interests, and with the voices of large sections of the population unrepresented.

At the same time there are many, mainly local, independent media publishers who are committed to holding those in power to account and to representing the voices of their communities, but the small scale of these operations limits their impact. As an independent publisher Opus, with over a decade of experience, believes that a flourishing, diverse and accountable media is essential for a healthy democracy, and we are actively engaged in both promoting independent media to a wider audience, and developing channels to collectivise and amplify the content from these organisations.

News Club UK

This year Opus has played a key role in establishing News Club UK, bringing together independent media

outlets from across the country. With our partners at The Media Fund, Rebel Cities and Bywire, we have piloted a series of YouTube videos, featuring a live streamed series of conversations with representatives from the best of the UK's independent media. Short excerpts from these discussions are then disseminated via social media to drive awareness of this alternative media output. There is also a News Club UK Telegram channel, where the Opus staff team aggregate the output from a wide range of independent media outlets to make this easily accessible in one location.

nowthenmagazine.com

We have recently launched a completely new website, designed as a platform capable of presenting a much wider range and volume of content. It is now easier to find themed articles and profiles for writers whose work is featured, and to share content through social media.

Opus has a long history of supporting citizen journalism, and we are now looking to develop this work further. We have obtained funding for a Community Correspondent, who will focus on stories and issues relevant to the many Sheffield communities who are under-represented in local and national media.

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now then

A Magazine for Sheffield

News & Views Arts & Culture Music Food Indie Trade Literature



Sheffield residents put in "intolerable" position over dangerous cladding

Leaseholders are expecting bills of tens of thousands of pounds to replace dangerous cladding similar to that used on Grenfell Tower.



Sheffield musicians record new song for refugees

During lockdown, an ensemble cast of 11 local players came together to create a track about the global refugee crisis.



Reviews in Retrospect: In Bruges

A superb alternative Christmas film, this crime drama-cum-black comedy is a contemporary fable that examines the nature of morality itself.



MEGAN THEE STALLION

Why women in rap still get a raw deal

From misogynoir to pitting women against one another, why is rap still reluctant to embrace its female stars?

CLIMATE ACTION

OPUS LED ON A MAJOR FUNDING APPLICATION WITH SHEFFIELD CLIMATE ALLIANCE (SCA) TO SECURE £200,000 DEVELOPMENT GRANT TO HELP SHEFFIELD CITY REGION TRANSITION TO A LOWER CARBON, HAPPIER, HEALTHIER LIFE.

Even in a year with a global pandemic, the climate crisis is an issue that demands our immediate attention. Our climate is changing and becoming more chaotic even faster than was predicted a decade ago. The loss of biodiversity, crop failure and rising temperatures are leading to dire consequences for every living being and ecosystem on the planet.

Opus shares these concerns and 12 months ago we made the decision to free up a significant amount of staff time to lead on a major funding application with Sheffield Climate Alliance (SCA). The outcome was a £200,000 development grant with the aim of helping Sheffield City Region make the transition to a lower carbon, happier, healthier life.

Sheffield Climate Alliance

Over an 18-month period, SCA will use this grant to:

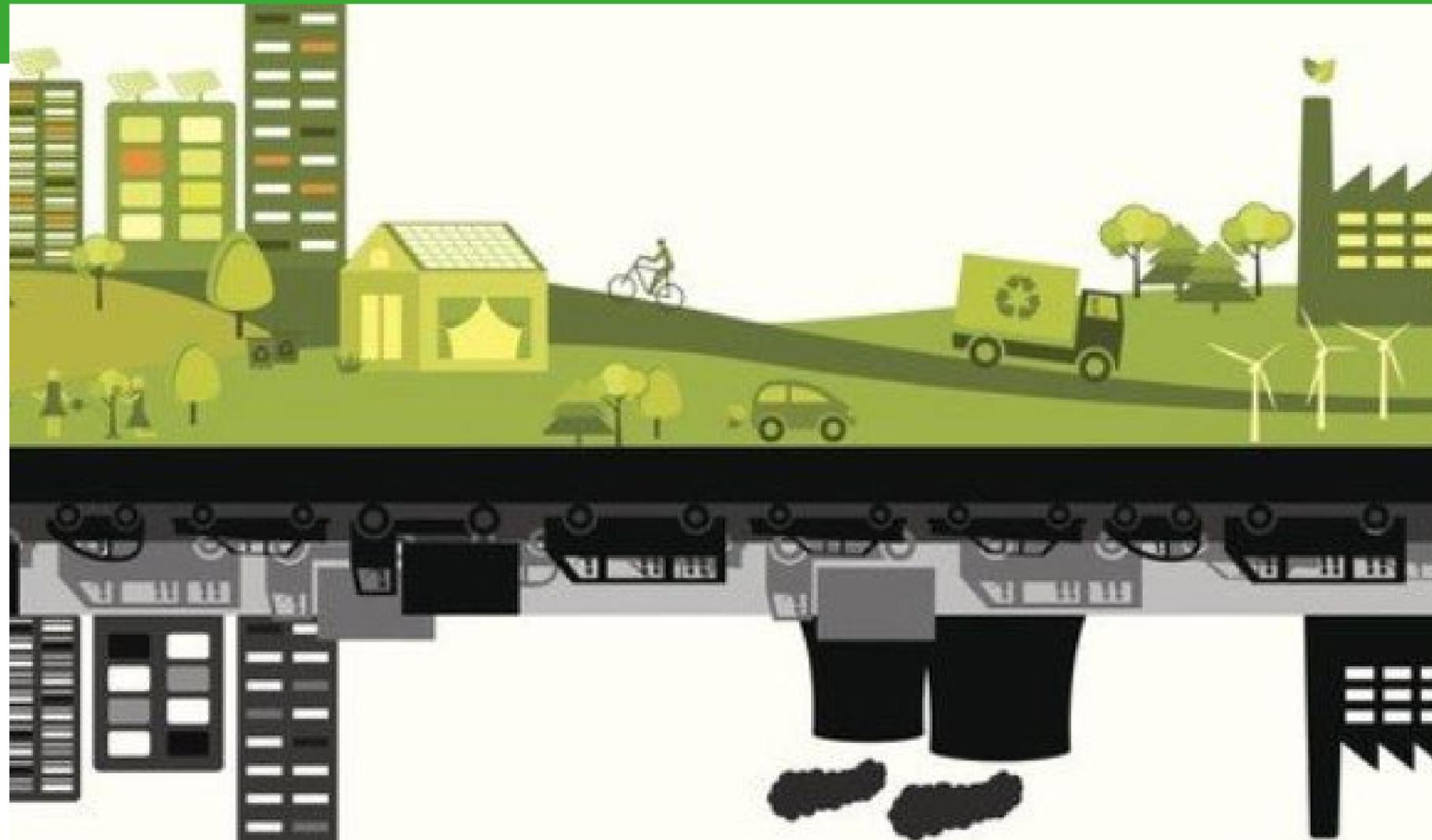
- Develop a sustainable partnership of organisations committed to a low carbon future.
- Explore methods of improving public understanding around climate change and the benefits of making positive change.
- Create Climate Action Hubs, both physical and virtual, to explore how we can share achievements and influence behaviour.
- Establish a new web portal linked to social media outputs which will capture and tell a low carbon story in an engaging and inspiring way.

With the development funding in place, Opus has played an active role in recruiting the staff roles enabled by this grant, and we have facilitated an initial meeting of 35 different agencies and groups who are committed to supporting the development plan.

Climate Correspondent

Whilst scientific information is essential, it is stories, not facts, which will change hearts and minds on the issue of climate change. Opus has regularly featured climate-related issues in Now Then's platforms but we are now aiming to prioritise this area by appointing a part-time Climate Correspondent.

With a focus on the Sheffield City Region, the Climate Correspondent will focus on key climate-related developments across the North of England, developing narratives which connect climate issues and climate action to people's lived experience, as well as championing decision-making when it is good and challenging it when it is poor. The postholder will also link with other independent media publishers, initially in the North and then nationwide, to develop shared learning and resources.



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NOT FOR PROFIT STRUCTURES

OPUS INDEPENDENTS OPERATES WITH A LIMITED BY GUARANTEE MODEL. WORKERS RETAIN MAJORITY CONTROL OF DECISIONS AND ALL STAFF ARE PAID THE SAME, REGARDLESS OF THEIR ROLE.

There is still a dominant narrative that private, commercial organisations are, in any circumstances, the most efficient option, and that a top down approach is the best way to deliver not only commercial, but public and community services. This myth continues despite evidence such as the collapse of the global financial system in 2008, the failed attempt to outsource elements of the probation service and, most recently, the fiasco of the Covid-19 national 'track and trace' system which ignored decades of expertise built up by local public health agencies.

At the same time, an alternative story has begun to emerge. Without attracting the same degree of attention, there has been a steady growth of the not for profit sector involving not only traditional charities but also a range of social enterprise and cooperative models, providing innovative and relevant services to their communities.

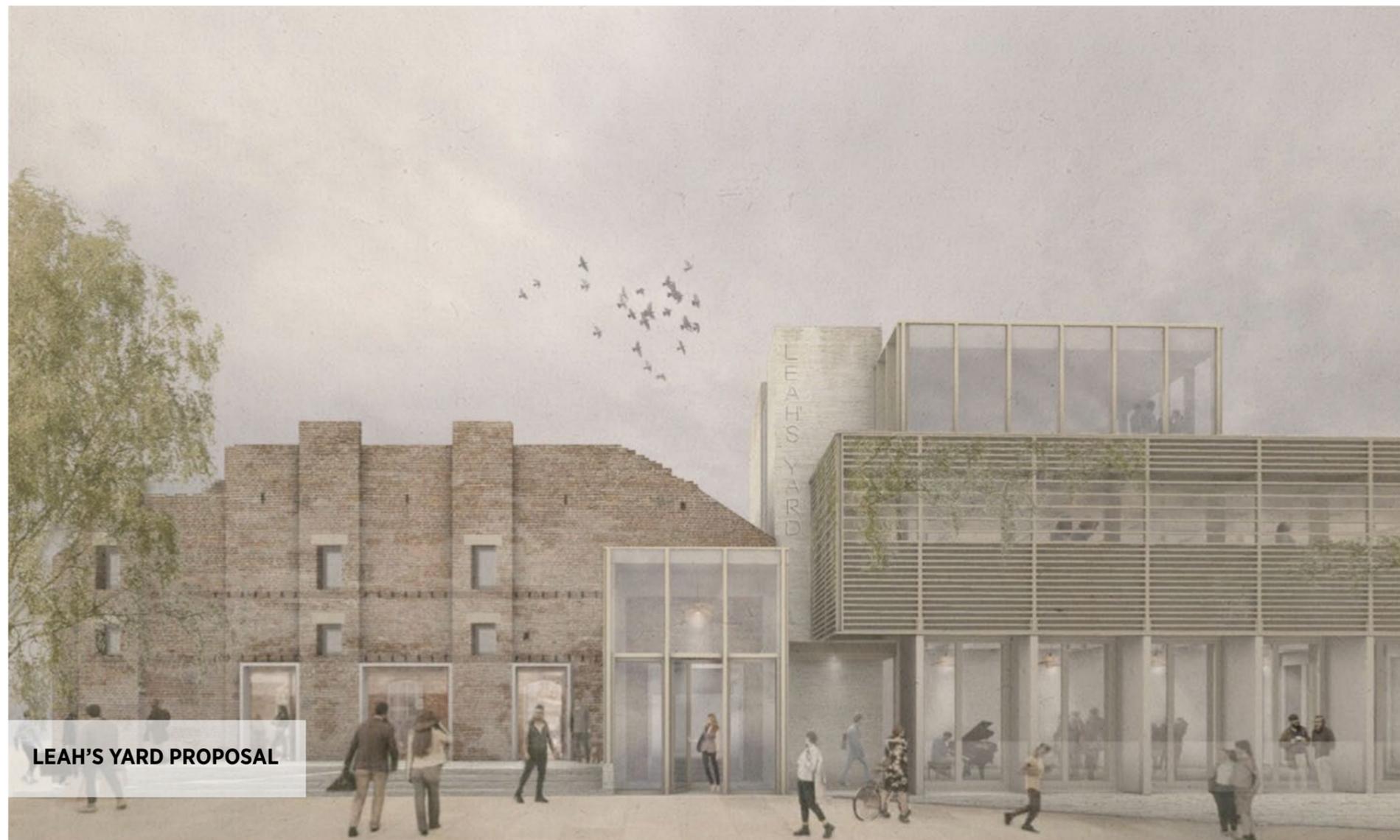
As a not for profit organisation launched in 2008, Opus is a committed advocate of this way of working. Whilst we have experienced many challenges over the last 12 years, we are also proud of Opus's achievements, and keen to promote the not for profit model and share our learning with other organisations in the sector. For us, this theme is still a work in progress, and we are looking to build on our activities to date which include:

- Challenging dominant narratives on the 'why' and 'how' of business by championing values-led organisations through Now Then Magazine, Festival of Debate, the Make Yourself at Home campaign, and our increased involvement with community groups in the city.
- Offering free marketing and social media support to social businesses impacted by Covid-19, enabling them to reach our audiences with key messages.
- One of our directors, James Lock, speaking at the Festival of Social Enterprise - Reset 2020, with Opus also providing some marketing support for this event.
- Developing and producing a short film on the work of Regather Cooperative and its work around sustainable food systems and the role of local food in a sustainable recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.



Regather Fruit & Veg Box Scheme
Community Benefit Society

CAMBRIDGE STREET SOCIAL ENTERPRISE



LEAH'S YARD PROPOSAL

Cambridge St Social Enterprise is a partnership formed by OPUS with two other local not for profit organisations, DINA and Union St. The partnership was formed to develop and submit a proposal for a multi-purpose social enterprise as part of Sheffield's 'Heart of the City' re-development.

The proposal aimed to transform Leah's Yard, one of Sheffield's most important historic buildings, into a business, social and visitor destination and an independent cultural hub. The plan included a café/bar, offices, co-working spaces, an event/performance space and workshops and studios for local artists and makers.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing we have just heard that the proposal has not been successful in the final stage, but we have learnt a lot from working together to develop a proposal on this scale and we will continue to look for similar opportunities over the coming months.

NARRATIVES OF CHANGE

NARRATIVES OF CHANGE ARE IMPORTANT TO VOICE THE POSSIBILITY OF A BETTER FUTURE, TO CELEBRATE POSITIVE ACTIONS IN THE PRESENT DAY, AND ALSO TO LEARN FROM TIMES IN THE PAST WHEN PEOPLE ACTED TOGETHER TO BRING ABOUT MAJOR SOCIAL ADVANCES.

2020 has been a tough year to be optimistic. Covid-19, the ongoing climate crisis, the continuing prevalence of systemic racism and the anti-democratic trends in the political arena have often made it seem that the only viable response is to stoically hope for something better to turn up. And this is part of the problem. If we cannot envisage change, if we do not understand how change comes about, then we are condemned to accepting the status quo.

Opus is committed to developing and sharing narratives of change, both through our own journalism and by providing a platform for those whose voices are often not heard. Over the last 12 months we have:

- Developed a series of videos for the 2020 Festival of Debate, providing a platform for organisations like Black Lives Matter, the Regather Food Cooperative and the UBI Lab Network to present their alternative vision.
- Produced a promotional film for Citizens Advice Sheffield, celebrating the agency's work and highlighting the changes need-

ed in the current welfare system.

- Promoted stories of resilience and renewal from the arts and culture sectors, the voluntary and community sector and the city's independent traders as part of the 'Make Yourself at Home' campaign.
- Written a 'Sheffield Makes Civil Society' report for Marketing Sheffield, recommending the establishment of a Civil Society Commission to provide an overarching narrative and strategy for the many incredible community initiatives that are taking place across the city.
- Tested how positive narratives around immigration and inequality could potentially bring the wider community together around these issues, in a piece of work commissioned by Cohesion Sheffield.

Sheffield Makes Civil Society

People-Powered Social Change in The Big Village

**Produced by Opus Independents
on behalf of Marketing Sheffield**

November 2020

MAKE YOURSELVES AT HOME

We promoted stories of resilience and renewal from the arts and culture sectors, the voluntary and community sector and the city's independent traders as part of the 'Make Yourself at Home' campaign. For the series we filmed and produced a series of films for Marketing Sheffield.

Radical Roots and How To Bounce Forward

Opus has also been successful in obtaining a grant for this project from the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust.

The work will focus on three key thematic strands:

1. Work & The Wellbeing Economy
2. Anti-Racism & Challenging Systemic Inequalities
3. Democracy & Voting Rights

For each theme, Opus will produce an article, a video and a live streamed event looking at how, in the past, campaigns around specific leverage points have resulted in significant change, and considering the relevance of this to current community activism.

RE-PURPOSING OUR MEMBERSHIP MODEL

Alongside this new framework for our future organisational priorities, we are also in the process of re-designing our business model to better complement Opus's future direction and its conviction that change comes from partnership and collaboration across civil society.

Partnerships and alliances across civil society have always been where effective campaigns and, ultimately, system change has emerged from. We are developing a pilot which blends alliance and membership approaches to strategically and sustainably collectivise and resource civil society organisations to make a difference in their locality.

We're aiming to help form an alliance of individuals and organisations which supports cross-sector resilience in the region and active citizenship while developing collaborative projects which address social, economic and environmental concerns at their root.

Our current thinking would see the model sustained through blended revenues from membership contributions (from organisations and individuals) and partnership funding. This revenue will unlock capacity to deliver a range of services for members, which include 'secretariat' functions, peer support, events, voice and public communications.

We anticipate these services boosting the resilience of value-led organisations, amidst difficult social and economic circumstances, while the overall framework enables civil society actors to recognise and act together on root issues of shared ecological, economic, social and political concern.

There's lots we'd like to see change in the world, here in Sheffield and beyond – change that would make the world fairer, healthier, happier – a better place for people to live and thrive.

We acknowledge that this might sound ambitious, but asking for 'better' is not asking for much, because little by little it adds up to the change we want to see. And change is desperately needed by everyone, but in particular, the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised, in our city and across the world. The challenge is that for change to last it has to happen 'upstream', right at the heart of the systems where problems begin.

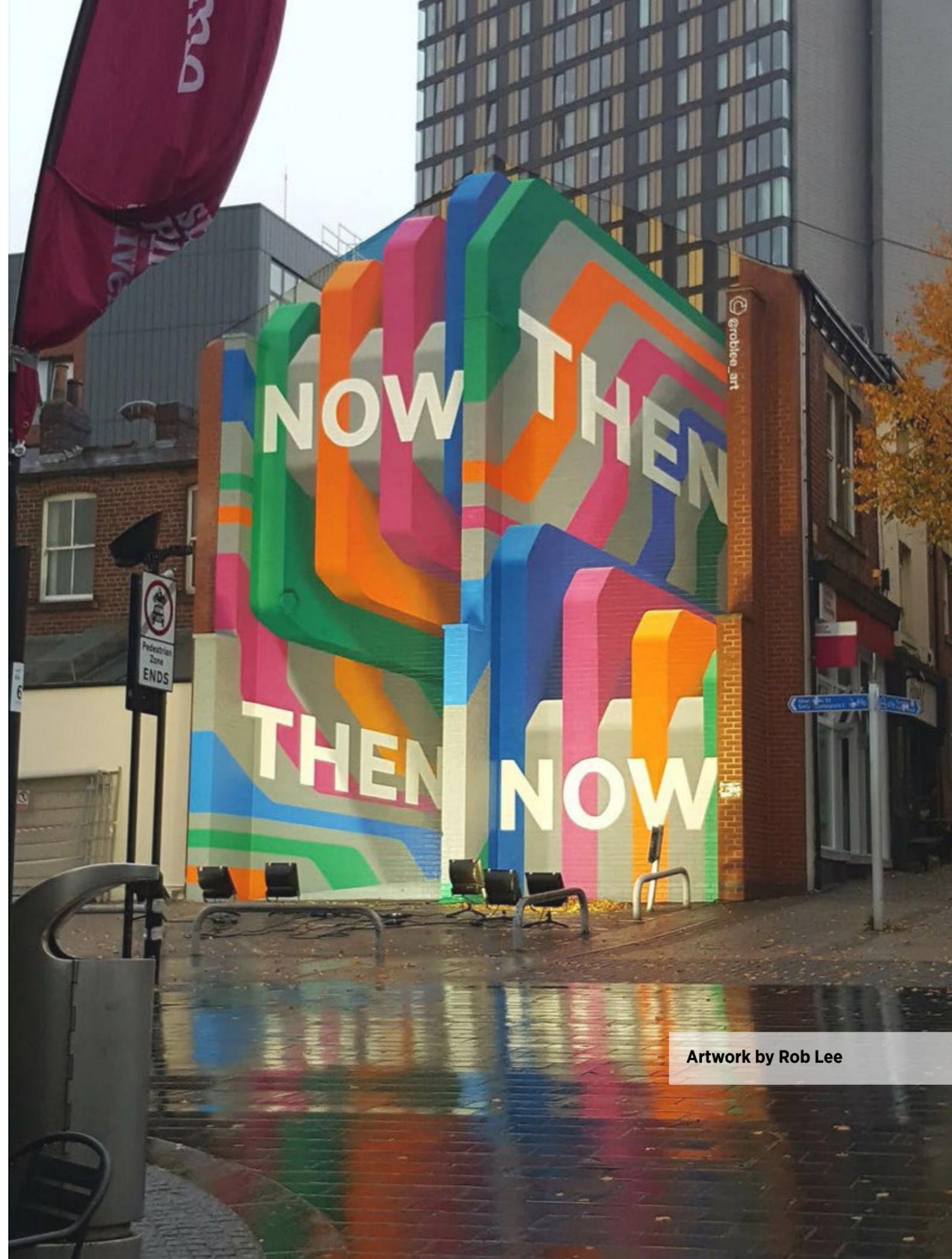
Over the last 12 years, Opus has built up a strong and growing network of relationships across community groups, charities, local authorities, universities and independent traders, as well as creating a committed audience across our platforms and our events. All of this, we believe puts us in a strong position to contribute to a new civil society partnership in Sheffield.

We are doing this because working together is the only way we can help each other to survive and, then thrive, post-pandemic. And because united is the only way we can start to tackle the root causes of problems such as gender inequality, poverty, hunger and racism.

We aim for the new membership framework to be available at various levels, depending on what members want and what they would like to contribute. There is also the potential of investing in joint projects, developing shared grant funding bids and collaborating on a range of activities to show our mutual commitment to a 'better' city and society.

We all know that change is needed – let's make it together.

If you are interested in talking with us about how your organisation might work with Opus on any of the issues covered in the review please contact james@weareopus.org. We would love to hear from you.



Artwork by Rob Lee