



Heeley Development Trust



Location
Heeley, Sheffield



Founded
1996



Legal structure
Company Limited by Guarantee, Registered Charity



Description of services
A development trust focusing on regeneration projects including parks and buildings in the Heeley area of Sheffield

Overview of the business

Heeley Development Trust (HDT) is a development trust founded by local residents, volunteers and business people in 1996. It came out of the community's desire to transform derelict space that was left after road plans were shelved in 1996, and 'a response to state failure':

'We [HDT] were invented by local people. For a decade or more – there were areas that were derelict and therefore issues with anti-social behaviour. Local people responded to that with a bid that went in to the Millennium Commission – it failed but they were told to continue their effort.'

In 1997, having raised funding, the Trust took ownership of 3.5 hectares of land on a 125-year lease from Sheffield City Council. HDT have been delivering youth, community, environmental and economic development projects in the Heeley area since then including:

- Heeley People's Park
- Sum Studios – Grade II listed Victorian school redeveloped as a managed work space with 46 creative business tenants

- The Heeley Voice – a local magazine (previously in print but now running online)
- Recycle Bikes – a social enterprise supporting disengaged young people to gain training, confidence, work experience and jobs
- Meersbrook Hall – The Trust is working in partnership with the Friends of Meersbrook Hall to revitalise the Hall and reopen it to the public
- UK Online Centre – offering free drop-in computer and internet access, as well as formal training in 'Computers for Beginners', digital imaging, spreadsheets, etc.

HDT employs 32 staff across the above projects.

Why is community accountability important?

The overarching meaning of community accountability for HDT is being responsive to community need: *'[It's about] providing services that local people want in a way that they want them. It is important for us to be inclusive and feel accessible to anyone.'*



Community accountability underpins the values/ethos of the organisation working to achieve positive change locally, which is further strengthened by the connection that the majority of staff, tenants, volunteers and trustees have with the local area:

'If we weren't accountable we'd be just a private business response – we can prove that we're making decisions based on values. Because we're trying to change the place we live – it gives us credibility, and a different level of dialogue. And it means we're making the right decisions rather than the wrong ones.'

Community accountability is a guiding force for HDT trustees to balance against the organisation's vision and strategy: *'It pushes the direction we might go in. We are taking on Meersbrook Hall very much in response to the community. On the other hand, if it hadn't fitted with the vision of connecting land, community and buildings [HDT's focus] then it wouldn't have been taken on. Vision plus being responsive – always bearing in mind the overall approach.'*

While responding to community need there is also awareness of city-wide strategic priorities that the organisation fits its plans with – such as Sheffield positioning itself as 'The Outdoor City' and increasing use/awareness/support of the People's Park: *'Having a city-wide view is useful as well. Without this, there are some things you have to take a bit of chance with. In relation to the outdoor city – getting people active – it fits with getting people into the park.'*

The organisation is perceived as a community resource by clients and tenants: *'If I had to explain to anyone it would be a case of walking through the park, showing the physical difference that [HDT] has made to the community.'*

What does accountability look like locally?

Here we use three categories to provide a snapshot of some of the mechanisms and methods that the business uses in community accountability. These categories are not hard and fast, and so there is some overlap between the areas outlined.

Structures

HDT sees itself as an umbrella organisation for the variety of assets and projects that it runs. As such it reaches out to the individuals involved in each of these areas of work through:

- **Membership of Heeley Millennium Park:** local people are encouraged to become a member of the park HDT manages. This costs £10 per year.
- **The Friends of Meersbrook Hall:** around 500 people have signed up as Friends.
- **Governance:** The board of trustees is made up of tenants, members of Meersbrook Hall group, Sum Studios and other areas of HDT's work. Those involved are from the local area: *'On the board there is a balance of skills. Engagement comes through an interest in HDT, having something to offer, and living locally.'* The Manager is accountable to the board of trustees. Decisiveness by the Manager and trustees has been important in taking opportunities to act on community need with the redevelopment of local assets.
- **HDT's people:** The people involved with HDT (staff, volunteers, and trustees) either currently live locally or have direct connections with the area, and there is a shared desire to improve the area: *'80% of the staff live within 5 minutes' walk, we are local people – the community.'*

Relationships

HDT values its relationships with the individuals and organisations that use or are involved in its buildings or projects, as well as participation in local meetings and forums: *'A big part of the community aspect is word of mouth – it's relational.'*

Sum Studios creates a community of businesses which HDT are responsive to: *'People value being part of a community, being a network, a community of businesses – the mix. Some might come out and be 'community businesses' – there are 46 businesses and sole traders, with more than 70 people employed.' Tenants also find that this community benefits their business: 'there are four or five of my clients in the building.'*

Communications

The events HDT runs are a key part of engaging with their community: *'By running events you put yourself in front of people – it's a direct invitation to dialogue.'*

HDT has also been able to build on the community activism that was expressed around the potential loss of Meersbrook Hall by working in partnership with the Friends group to run adult and community learning sessions from the site.

Communications have changed over time, influenced both by available funding and technology, with the Heeley Voice moving from hard copy to an online version. Awareness that 'not everybody is on Facebook' shapes an ongoing desire to connect with local people appropriately and respond to their concerns and priorities: *'Accountability never stops but the issues change over time, so we need to be aware of how and who we communicate with.'*