

## Democracy in City Leap

*We are ready to contribute to making City Leap into an opportunity for increasing democratic accountability of Bristol's zero carbon transition. We believe that deliberative decision making and commons governance are key.*

### What is City Leap?

City Leap will be one of the main ways that decarbonisation of Bristol's energy and buildings is achieved. Bristol City Council has now selected a private partner to establish a joint venture. The hope is that this will bring in a level of investment and technical expertise that the council did not perceive to be possible from its own resources.

### What does this mean for democracy?

The big changes we need to make to mitigate and adapt to climate change need meaningful citizen participation. This is always challenging to implement, but the decision to set up a public-private joint venture presents specific opportunities and challenges for citizen participation and accountable decision making.

There is a time sensitive opportunity to embed democratic participation into the culture and governance of the joint venture from the outset. We believe that the detailed governance arrangements are key - and while ownership arrangements matter, the actual practices of collaboration, feedback and resource allocation can make a bigger difference.

### What next?

Praxis is poised to support the agenda of embedding democracy into City Leap through advancing understanding of the deliberative decision-making and commons.

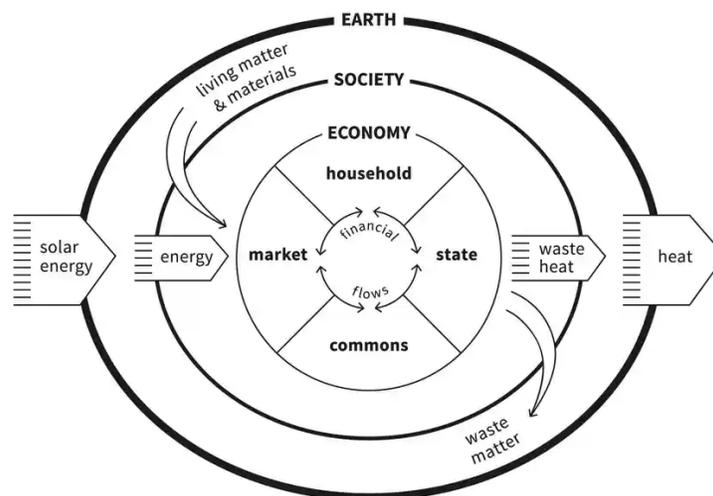
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We can offer:

- The design, review and evaluation of governance structures
- Identifying social value and public interests beyond the Council's procurement process
- Creative engagement with varied stakeholders so a diverse and broad range of voices is included
- Injecting fun and excitement into a process to inspire public participation and engagement to achieve positive outcomes
- Monitoring and evaluation of City Leap implementation

This research and practice agenda is framed by believing that the **commons** and **deliberative decision making** need to be included in the development of city governance.

Commons manifest in different forms, but their importance is clearly articulated by Kate Raworth in her 'economy' model below, where the commons are one of four essential sectors of the economy, alongside the household, market and state:



(Kate Raworth)

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City leap, in its formal governance, is a partnership between market and state sectors of the economy. Our commons agenda in the context of City Leap is to explore how it can play an enabling role in strengthening and developing the commons sector of the economy.

Commons are broadly defined as communities managing, distributing and often creating resources for themselves, within a wider economic context. In the context of City Leap, this would involve using the resources allocated to communities to strengthen community owned assets, controlled by communities themselves, in the long term. This could include:

- Communities owning and investing in sections of local district heat networks to connect homes that might otherwise be outside of the priority investment areas.
- Participatory allocation of funds from a 'community fund' combining funding from the City Leap JV and community owned energy assets.
- Communities identifying and implementing co-benefits of City Leap infrastructure investments, e.g. planting street trees where the location of services has been clarified for district heating construction.

Deliberative democratic decision making in this context involves ongoing dialogue between a diverse range of stakeholders. Deliberative forums can be varied and can involve different types of participation. Deliberation should be embedded in governance of City Leap and used particularly for the Development Grant Fund used for public benefit.

Our deliberation agenda is to embed the conditions for good quality dialogical decision making within City Leap. Good quality deliberation involves clear and accurate communication of technical information in a way that can be understood by everyone involved; welcoming different perspectives and ways of knowing, including emotions, embodied experiences, and knowledge.

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In the context of City Leap, deliberation could be utilised for deciding how to allocate funds; identifying co-benefits in a particular street or neighbourhood; and maintaining an inclusive agenda throughout City Leap's programmes and plans.

Please see below for a summary of our previous report on democracy in City Leap.

## Democracy and City Leap report insights

Why democracy matters in City Leap:

- There is a risk that existing inequalities will be further entrenched if a diverse range of people are not included in the process
- There is an opportunity for City Leap to contribute to deepening the democratic and participatory processes in Bristol, [which is part of the city's agenda](#).
- High levels of public support is necessary for policies to be effective in practice.
- Democracy means resources for mass, broad public involvement in decision making are necessary, and the decision making procedures should be inclusive and transparent.

Specific challenges due to the Joint Venture approach include:

- Commercial confidentiality which may restrict information, transparency and accountability
- Return on investment/profitability requirements (where local government may have more flexibility to prioritise social value).

Praxis Research has been investigating how City Leap can be made into **an opportunity for increasing democratic accountability of the zero carbon transition**.

Our findings indicate that good practice will involve:

- Building on and working with existing democratic and community institutions

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- Going beyond existing institutions and community organisations to increase inclusion and diversity
- Being aware of the margins – how can we listen more to those who are on the edges or have the least voice?
- Recognising different forms of knowledge and ways of participating – not everyone participates by verbally articulating their ideas and opinions, for some people it is by seeing what needs to be done and doing it.

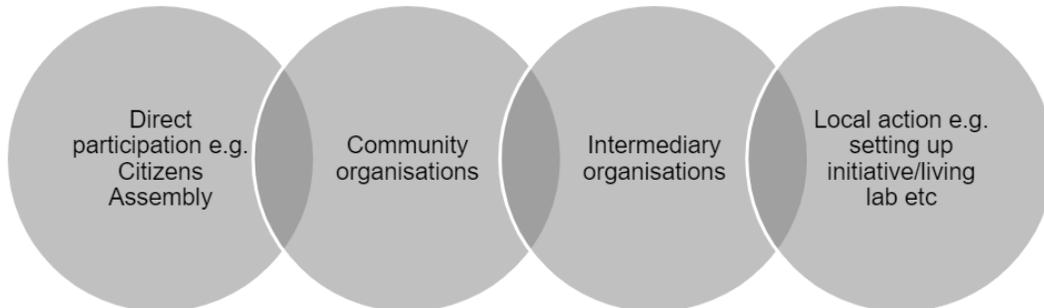
## Formalised city governance channels

There are a number of pre-existing formalised city governance channels as below:

- Bristol City Council Councillors – engaging and responding to the needs of the neighbourhoods they represent.
- One city boards – thematically focused, with representatives of key organisations in Bristol working on each theme.
- Voice and Influence Partnership – this was a project (no longer active) to represent the voices of equalities communities within Bristol.
- Community development officers – Bristol City Council employed staff who carry out community development work in different neighbourhoods of the city.
- Consultations and surveys – official and statutory consultations that are published on Bristol City Council's website and which citizens and interested parties can respond to with their views. Typically consultations are published when detailed plans have already been developed.
- Planning process – a statutory process where planning applications for new developments are assessed by Bristol City Council planning officers, and are published on the Council website for anyone to comment on with support or objections.

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In addition to these, we have mapped four broad approaches to participation:



All four of these approaches have their strengths and weaknesses (detailed in our [report](#)), and as such we believe that the most effective approach to democracy will involve weaving them together into a rich tapestry.

## Direct participation

Bringing together a diverse group of citizens to deliberate on an issue is an opportunity for direct participation in decision-making – in contrast to voting for representatives who will then make decisions on citizens’ behalfs.

The Citizens Assembly model, where participants are chosen to be representative of the wider population, is a form of direct participation. Selecting a few representative citizens enables them to take the time to listen to different perspectives and information, and make an informed judgment. Outcomes tend to have a high level of perceived legitimacy by the general population. However, this approach is time and resource intensive, people who are most excluded in society are less likely to be able to participate, and the civil servants commissioning the citizens assembly have power to decide what topics are addressed, and to frame the issue.

## Community Organisations

Bristol has a rich amount of community organisations of all shapes and sizes. Some of these are ‘of’ communities, existing within them, and others are serving particular communities that are seen as in need. Community organisations may be more trusted than the council by some people who have experiences of marginalisation.

Through providing services and building long term relationships, community organisations have access to information about the needs and concerns of people who may not have the knowledge, confidence or skills to put their views across in a deliberative discussion.

The recent [Many Neighbourhoods One City](#) report by the University of Bristol and Praxis Research explores the role of anchor organisations, one type of community organisation, in depth.

## Intermediary Organisations

Some organisations take a role as 'intermediary' between formal authorities and communities. These are sometimes referred to as 'infrastructure organisations' in the NGO world, meaning institutional infrastructure rather than physical infrastructure such as pipes or pylons. Their roles include networking community organisations, coordinating policy responses and advocacy, and providing services at a larger scale than community organisations. Intermediary organisations may be more professionalised than community organisations (although not necessarily), and may operate at a more strategic level.

These include organisations such as Bristol Energy Network, Bristol Green Capital Partnership, Voscur and more.

## Local Action and Initiative

Participation in shaping the future of the city does not just take the form of participation and voice in decision-making. Direct initiative and innovation is also important - space to try and play is important for ideas to form. Some people are better at expressing themselves through doing than through talking, and a full democratic system should include their creativity.

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Local pilot projects or innovations are a great way of testing ideas and allowing 'do-ers' to contribute directly. Acceptance of a certain risk of failure is important, and can be mitigated by starting small and local.

## Existing participatory opportunities

Successful City Leap democracy will involve building on existing participatory opportunities rather than reinventing the wheel.

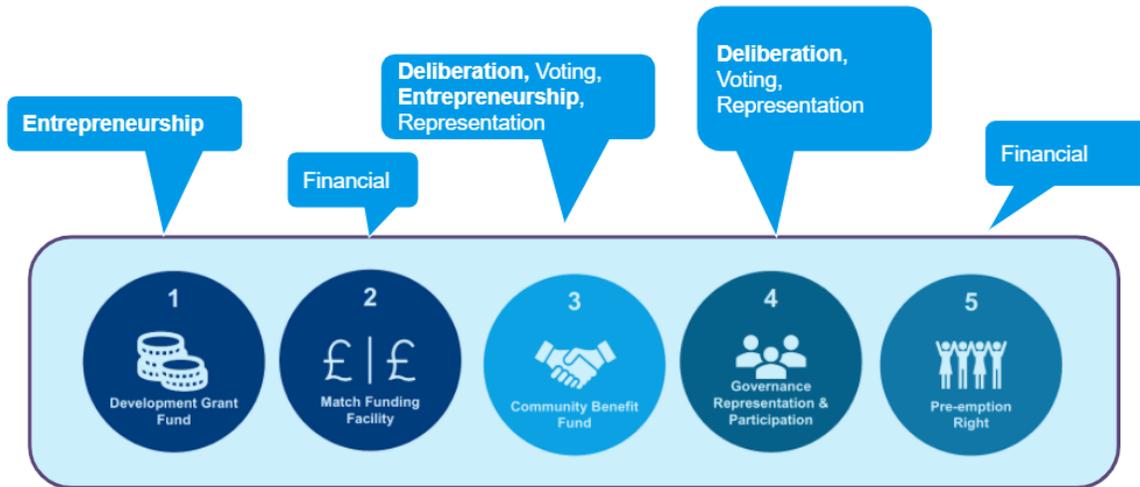
### Community Energy Propagator

A Community Energy Propagator 'consortium' of community energy organisations has been negotiating with the City Leap team over the last few years. This is a key 'intermediary organisation' for City Leap. It includes the following organisations: Bristol Green Capital Partnership; Bristol Energy Network; Low Carbon Gordano; Bristol Energy Co-operative; Centre for Sustainable Energy; Zero West.



The five asks that the consortium made to the City Leap bidders each provide opportunities for citizen participation, with asks 3 and 4 (community fund and governance and representation) providing the greatest opportunity.

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1. The Development Grant fund would support community energy projects to carry out initial feasibility studies and development work, thus enabling entrepreneurial activity within communities.
2. The match funding facility would mean that citizen investment and other forms of investment in community energy would go further, through match by City Leap.
3. The allocation of a community benefit fund brings an opportunity for participation from a broad range of stakeholders. It also provides an opportunity for local initiative and entrepreneurship to be supported through the fund.
4. The Governance Representation and Participation ask is the most directly oriented towards democracy. There are a number of ways this could be structured - whether it is a board of selected representatives (potentially selected by voting), or a deliberative body chosen by sortition, or an open forum.
5. The pre-emption right allows citizens to invest directly in the main City Leap project, and therefore participate financially.

The next step with this project is to deepen our understanding of deliberation and commons in these five areas, and in other areas beyond the five identified above.

The scope of this work could be established with the partners of City Leap and other interesting stakeholders.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Bristol Sustainable Energy Research Fund for funding our initial exploratory research. The full report from this research can be downloaded here: [www.praxis-research.co.uk/2021/03/04/democracy-in-city-leap](http://www.praxis-research.co.uk/2021/03/04/democracy-in-city-leap)