

Community wealth building 2026: Building an economy that works for local people

What is community wealth building?

Community wealth building seeks to change who owns wealth, who benefits from growth, and where money flows.

Too often, wealth created in places leaks out through low pay, insecure work, distant shareholders and extractive contracts. Community wealth building aims to keep more wealth circulating locally through **democratic ownership, locally rooted enterprise** and the **strategic use of public power**.

It is about building economies that serve **people, place and planet**.

Why does it matter now?

Many councils face rising demand, tight budgets, low pay, poor health and widening inequality. Traditional growth strategies often increase output without improving everyday life.

Community wealth building focusses instead on the **everyday economy** – care, retail, food, logistics, housing and local services – **where many residents work and where living standards are shaped** most directly.

Why does it work?

Councils and anchor institutions such as the NHS, colleges and housing providers already shape local economies through spending, employment, land and investment. Community wealth building uses these levers deliberately to create wider social value.

Evidence from Preston found links with **higher wages, improved life satisfaction and better mental health outcomes** following the adoption of a community wealth building approach.

Councils already shape the economy. Community wealth building is about using that power intentionally – so wealth created locally benefits local people.

Find out more at cles.org.uk, or contact us on info@cles.org.uk

Five practical pillars



Progressive procurement

Use public spending to support local suppliers, SMEs, co-operatives and social enterprises where possible.

Fair employment

Promote Real Living Wage, secure work, progression opportunities and good labour standards.

Plural ownership

Grow co-operatives, municipal enterprises, community businesses and social enterprises alongside private firms.

Land and assets for community benefit

Use land, property and regeneration powers to create long-term local value.

Local finance and investments

Use pensions, lending, grants and investment tools to support local priorities.

What can councillors do?

- Make community wealth building central to council strategy
- Ask where public money goes and who benefits
- Require contracts to promote fair work and local value
- Support co-operatives, social enterprise and SMEs
- Ensure land and regeneration powers benefit the community
- Amplify these actions across the NHS and other anchor institutions