



Economic Recovery Fund Evaluation

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- Sheffield City Council launched the ERF in March 2021 – a £2 million fund to support high street recovery in district centres.
- A large emphasis was placed upon collaboration, local autonomy, local decision making and creative solutions.
- Eight successful applicants received up to £50,000 in funds and seven successful applicants received up to £200,000 in funds.
- ERF is taking an innovative and unique approach to district high street recovery with only one comparable fund in the UK



Our Brief

Kada Research were commissioned by SCC in mid-July 2022 to evaluate the £2m Economy Recovery Fund with the aim to investigate:

- ERF achievements in terms of key outputs/impacts
- What worked well and what elements should be taken forward into a future iteration of the fund
- Areas that didn't work as well and how they could be rectified
- How the ERF approach could inform future district centre work

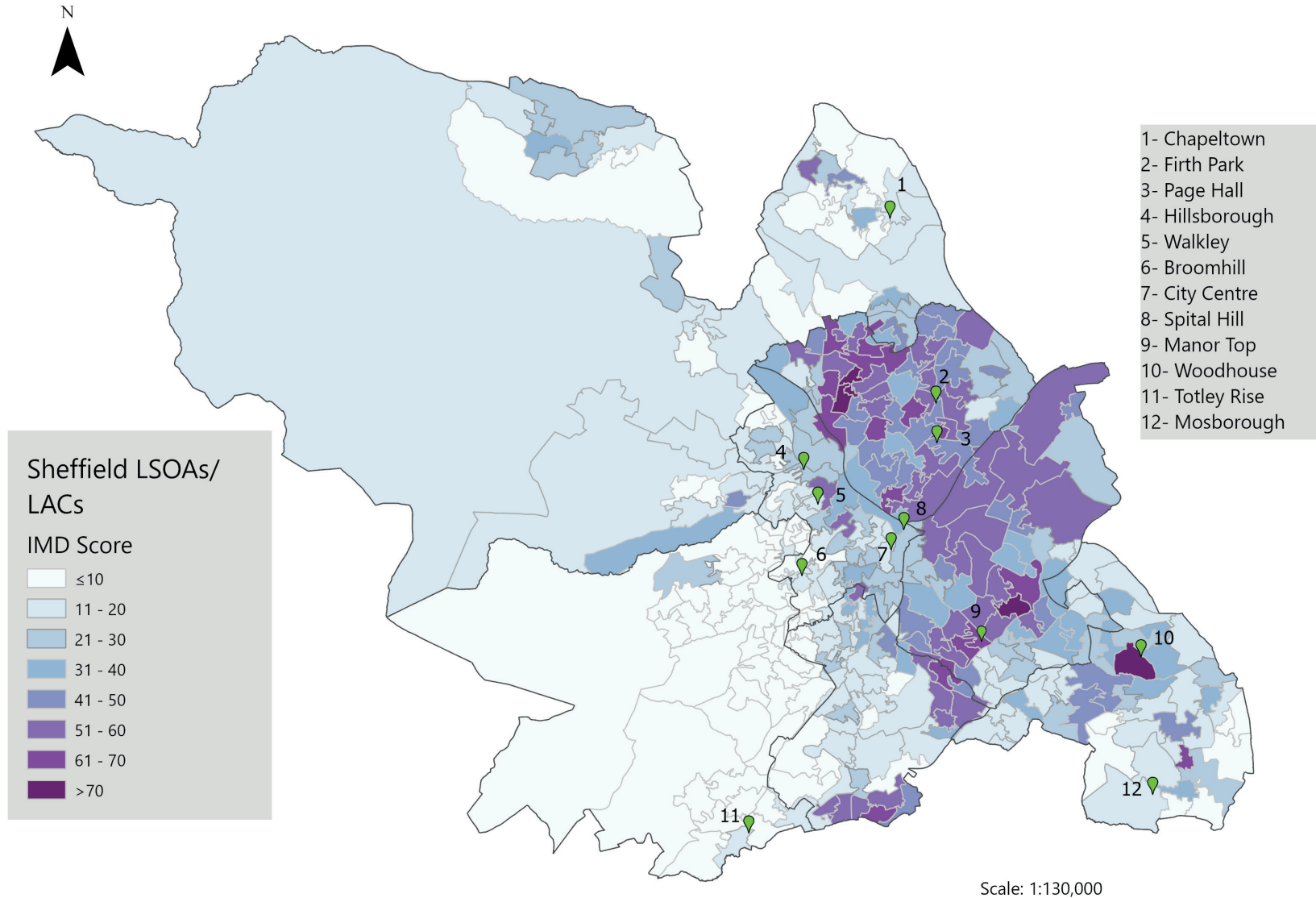
What We Did

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The study structure and approach were co-designed with Sheffield City Council Delivery Management Team. Its key elements included:

- An **inception stage** to develop a workplan and research tools
- A **desk review** to build an understanding of the wider strategic context, collate intelligence/data, project progress, and comparator projects
- **24 stakeholder discussions** with leading members of the steering group, Business Information Officers, all project leads and several beneficiaries
- **Primary research** with visits to five districts in receipt of funds with the Business Information Officers
- **Impact assessment** evaluating the social and economic impact, return on investment and wider benefits
- **Reporting and presentation** of the key findings and recommendations

Successful Applications

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Impacts

- The social value captures the wider benefits (beyond money) of an organisation or programme to society such as ‘increased self confidence’ or the case of our assessment for ERF ‘living in a good neighbourhood’
- A social value impact assessment looks at this social value in monetary terms – for every £1 spent on delivery what does this create in social value benefits?
- We found the social value impact of the projects was reflected by a healthy **net social return of between £1.99 and £2.24 per £1 spent.**

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Impacts

“Lots of my customers have commented on the new shopfront and how they like the fact that money has been spent in the area”

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“It is definitely busier on market days. It has had an impact upon footfall”

“The new bins and regular collections have made a real impact; you only have to look out the front to see”

“The feedback about the Christmas lights has been phenomenal, people want more”

“I’ve not heard a negative word said about the work we delivered. Some businesses who were very reluctant to start off with are now helping to maintain it.”



“One of my customers said that he had seen a friend at one of his markets that he hadn’t seen for twenty years despite still living in the area”

As of September 2022 the ERF has delivered:



16
community events



5
banner installation programmes



1
purchase of market infrastructure



1
street art installation programme



1
arts trail



3
bench installation programmes



1
photography exhibition



1
creative employment programme



1
park safety improvement programme



3
bin installation programmes



1
car parking improvement scheme



4
marketing campaigns



2
shopfront competitions



4
Christmas light installation/ infrastructure programmes



2
shopfront improvement programmes



2
parklets



1
tree planting programme



8
new retail business forums launched or planned

Key findings

The ERF has:

- Delivered 56 interventions across the city
- Supported communities across Sheffield and built new partnerships
- Led to the establishment of eight new business forums
- Received positive feedback from businesses and communities
- Visibly improved district centres
- Empowered community and business groups
- Achieved successful budget control
- Overwhelmingly supported by stakeholders
- Received positive media coverage which has promoted the 'game changing' fund and districts



The Application Process

- The applicant's expertise, experience, capacity and the local community infrastructure were crucial factors in how easy they found the application
- The fifteen successful applications covered a wide demographic range of communities, although as the map highlights gaps still exist
- Stakeholders would welcome clearer guidance on what outputs are within scope
- The open nature of the application supported a wide variety of ideas
- Fostering business community consensus and formulating an application was often very reliant upon a local champion such as the Business Information Officer or one key retailer. Where this champion does not exist targeted support was required.

Delivery

- Project leads and teams came from a variety of backgrounds and numerous delivery approaches were adopted. This was reflective of the open nature of the application process

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- Areas with pre-existing clearly organised community frameworks experienced less initial delivery challenges than areas who needed to establish these new structures
- Project management skills, experience and capacity on the ground were key to successfully deliver interventions, challenges arose where this was missing or stretched



Delivery

- Tension occasionally arose between the desire for local autonomy and Sheffield City Council protocols
- Stakeholders overwhelmingly welcomed the autonomous community delivery model
- Delivery teams were very positive about the support and guidance that they received from the central ERF project team
- The Business Information Officers were a clear asset in supporting delivery



Strengths

- Fifteen ERF projects were successfully launched across the city, with all on track to deliver a variety of well received outputs
- Local feedback has been largely very positive with many welcoming tangible improvements to their district high streets. Residents have seen the outputs as a clear demonstration of the council's commitment to the health of their district centre
- ERF's focus upon autonomy and locally controlled decision making was overwhelmingly welcomed by stakeholders and has been achieved within budget
- ERF Round One has created a large appetite for future iterations of the programme
- Round One of the programme has provided a wealth of models, outputs and experiences that could positively inform future iterations

Emerging Conclusions

- The ERF application process has highlighted an uneven picture of local business infrastructure and potential project leads across the city
- Delivery capacity was stretched when it relied upon community teams with limited skills and time/resources.
- Continued outreach work is required to ensure that the retail business community are fully represented within the project teams
- Round Two of ERF will be well served by the wide variety of case studies, delivery models and experiences that future applicants/delivery teams can draw upon.
- Getting the application right in terms of expectations, scope, understanding and required expertise & experiences would mitigate many of the challenges faced during Round One.

Recommendations

- Improve the monitoring of ERF funded projects for example with bi-monthly progress forms which have been co-designed with the delivery team and providing support through Business Information Officers were required
- Create a guide for potential applicants, using the examples and lessons from the ERF Phase 1, to improve clarity and understanding of the requirements, scope, and processes of ERF during the application process. This could inform a 'self-assessment' for applications and highlight areas of support
- Consider options to make the application process more inclusive and accessible for example creating a 'pitch stage' or visits to potential locations
- Increase the diversity of the Steering Group to be more reflective of the communities across the ERF supports across Sheffield
- Explore the potential for a separate fund to support potential applicants where there is a lack of capacity to ensure the ERF is accessible to all communities of Sheffield

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