



## **The Old School Building Company - creating Shipley Sustainable Community Hub**

The former St. Paul's Church of England School in Shipley became home to Hive Bradford and the Kirkgate Community Centre. This pre 1900 building was dated and was approaching a situation where it would no longer be fit for purpose if action was not taken. The organisations came together to create The Old School Building Company (OSBC) to obtain, repair and manage the aging building. The building was leased through Bradford Council and OSBC went through a community asset transfer process to bring it into their ownership.

The £3million refurbishment and retrofit project was funded through the Government-funded Shipley Towns Fund (administered by Bradford Council), Community Ownership Fund, Bradford 2025, Mayor's Climate Change Grant and the Architectural Heritage Fund. The project went beyond the necessary structural changes with a focus on being environmentally and people friendly, while maintaining the original features. The sustainability, longevity and reduced environmental impact of the building has been possible by adding solar panels, a heat pump, insulation, and double-glazed windows. The suppliers and contractors used for the project were local which was important to OSBC so that the funding could also support the local economy.

Gill Thornton, Chair of the Shipley Towns Fund said: *"The Shipley Towns Fund was proud to support this transformative project. Through the custodianship of these two inspiring organisations, the building has become a focal point for the community and a catalyst for future regeneration."*

Councillor Alex Ross-Shaw, Bradford Council's Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Transport added: *"This has been an incredible project successfully delivered. It is a great opportunity for Hive and the Kirkgate Community Centre to work together to offer increased services and enable them to support even more people locally for generations to come."*

The users of the building were at the core of the project and the team worked with the community and local architects to understand what was needed and possible from the project. The space is

now agile and flexible for the different users that walk through the door, as well as catering for different needs with accessibility lifts throughout the building. Since moving back into the building, additional work has been identified which could further improve accessibility. In May 2025 they have installed acoustic ceiling baffles made from recycled plastic to make the historic infrastructure work for their users. Hive Bradford is based in the downstairs of the building, and Kirkgate Community Centre occupy the upstairs. Prior to the refurbishment, the two organisations had no access to each other within the building and had separate entrances. While they are still two distinct organisations delivering valuable services for the community, the building is now one connected hub that provides a safe and holistic space - a café for socialising, wellbeing and hobby activities, welfare support, and creative outlets all under one roof.

The timing of the project brought challenges as changes in the global context led to increased pressures on budget for materials, which meant that OSBC had to adjust through value engineering to initially prioritise essential works. Through securing extra funding, the team were able to revisit the plans to include these additional features. There was also an element of the unknown delivering a largescale project on a historical building. Until the work started, the team did not know what they would uncover and along the 13-month refurbishment there were instances which affected timelines. Both organisations had to relocate their activities to alternative venues which incurred additional costs which were only possible with pre-planning and building charitable reserves to minimise disruption and still provide treasured services to the community. The building reopened in October 2024 and 730 attendees came to the event. There was a worry that groups using the building may drop off during the closure, but they reopened with a full timetable. The retrofit and refurbishment works has seen an increased footfall in the building and new groups using the space.

The Old School Building Company now own the building which Hive Bradford and Kirkgate Community Centre have subleases, with all payments going back into maintenance costs. The two charities coming together on this project to make the space work for them is a great example of partnership working and bringing the local community and stakeholders along the process. Later in the year the team will be able to report on their annual figures and insights around savings and carbon reductions. They have also been approached by another local organisation who are wanting to explore a similar project to share their learning and recommendations.

[Check out the Facebook page which documented The Shipley Sustainable Community Hub project](#)