



Preparing a business plan for your community building

A short guide

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Introduction

This guide has been created to support volunteer trustees and management committees of community buildings through the process of creating a business plan. We know that many of you bring huge professional expertise to your roles, but that time is limited and writing a business plan can feel daunting. This guide is designed to make the process straightforward and achievable.

Rather than asking you to produce long reports, the guide sets out a series of questions to answer. By working through the sections and answering the questions, you will build up a clear, practical business plan that:

- Describes your building and its role in the community
- Helps you think about your users, your market and your future opportunities
- Shows how you will manage the building, finances and people
- Identifies risks and how you will deal with them
- Sets out the actions you need to take to stay sustainable for the long term

You don't need to write pages of text for each section. Bullet points, short answers and notes are fine. The important thing is to have an honest picture of where you are now, what challenges you face and how you plan to move forward.

Remember: this is your plan. Use it in a way that works for you. You can adapt the questions, add extra sections if needed or skip ones that don't apply. It should be a living document, reviewed and updated regularly, not just put on a shelf once written.

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The guide is intended to complement Cambridgeshire ACRE's core community buildings advice service. For further help and support on running your community building, or if you would like to find out more about the benefits of becoming a Cambridgeshire ACRE member, please email enquiries@cambsacre.org.uk, call us on 01353 860850 or visit our website at www.cambsacre.org.uk.

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Why do community buildings need a business plan?

Purpose of this section

This section explains why every management committee should have a business plan for their community building.

There are several very good reasons why management committees should produce a business plan for their community building:

- It brings your committee members/volunteers together so that you can collectively ascertain what you are trying to achieve.
- It examines how your building delivers services to the community now and in the future.
- It serves as a recognition that you are demonstrating best practice which may give users and stakeholders confidence in using the building.
- It helps with the planning and management of large building improvement projects.
- It encourages you to consider how you might need to adapt to changing circumstances, protect yourself against risks, and take advantage of any opportunities that arise.
- It may be asked for when applying for funding instead of completing an application form or, in any case, information in the business plan can be used as the basis for completing a variety of funding application forms so you don't have to re-invent the wheel for each application.

There is no one set formula or definitive template to follow when writing a business plan, no two plans are ever the same. They can be big or small and formats vary. The length of your business plan should reflect the level of what you are trying to achieve but there are common sections to all which you will need to consider.

A business plan is a working document and using it in your regular meetings means you can check where you are against your targets so that you can monitor progress and adjust things as required.

How far into the future should you plan?

The timeframe of the business plan is completely up to you. Typically, community buildings produce three or five year business plans: anything longer can become speculative, as it is difficult to forecast into the long term with any degree of certainty. Anything less than three years though and the process will be more like short-term action planning.

Bear in mind that having produced a three or five year business plan, you will need to refresh it annually and ultimately develop a new one at the end of the period. Revisiting the plan every year will show you how well you have forecasted and where you need to adapt your plans for the future.

Where should I start?

Purpose of this section

This section suggests a framework for developing your business plan and how to find support if your management committee doesn't feel confident to embark on the process by yourselves.

You need to allow yourself enough time to develop the plan. The initial stages of outlining the plan and harnessing everyone's ideas will take a few days. Compiling the information, especially if you haven't started to gather it together, might take a good deal longer.

Work together as a committee, using this guide, to go through the key sections of the plan. One useful way of working is to run a workshop with all management committee members, using a flipchart to capture everyone's ideas and thoughts.

Having a single individual with overall responsibility for drafting the content of the plan should ensure that the resulting document is coherent and focused, so ensure that someone with good writing skills is nominated to write the actual plan.

It is important to keep revisiting the plan at different stages in its development, to ensure that it continues to reflect the full range of views within your management committee. So be prepared to spend time on the review stages. Each draft will need to be reviewed by as many of the management committee as possible.

Here is an example of a business planning framework:

- From your management committee, establish a business planning sub-group comprising three to five members, including a good writer and the Chairperson.
- For the sub-group, set out each person's role, how often it will meet, how it will communicate between meetings, and how it will report on its progress.
- The sub-group should create a decision-making framework i.e. list all areas that need decisions.
- Organise a workshop with all stakeholders to discuss and make decisions on the key aspects of your business plan.
- Produce a first draft document (using a shared online document if preferred) based on material generated through your workshop and other research.
- Present the first draft to the full management committee and ask for feedback.
- Make essential changes and revisions.
- Produce the final plan that reflects the revisions.

- Present the Executive Summary (always written last) of the final version to the full management committee for approval.

Help and advice

Your management committees may find it useful to work with an external adviser to help them produce a business plan. Depending on the skill-sets within your committee, you may decide it is best to seek substantial support with the business planning process, or you may simply ask an adviser to provide some feedback on a plan that your committee has produced itself.

Key to the use of advisory support for business planning should be that everyone involved in running the community building thoroughly understands and feels ownership over the resulting document. As long as this balance is maintained, a good adviser can bring a level of expertise and specialist know-how to the planning process that the group may otherwise not have.

Cambridgeshire ACRE may be able to provide fully-funded advisory support for community buildings wishing to develop a business plan. This depends on the funding that the charity itself has received. If a fully-funded option is not available, then community buildings can request a quote for providing consultancy support.

If you choose to employ an adviser outside of Cambridgeshire ACRE, try to follow these good practice guidelines:

- Produce a concise written brief that sets out exactly what you want and over what timescale.
- Ask the adviser to furnish you with a written proposal of what he/she is going to provide against the brief and what this will cost.
- Ensure that the adviser that you hire has an established track record.
- Before you begin working together, establish a written agreement that sets out what is expected from each party.
- Make sure that there is regular monitoring of progress.
- Ensure that you have a clear end point to the advisory process, so that you do not become dependent on the adviser.

What should we cover in our business planning?

Purpose of this section

This section outlines the main sections that you might expect to include in your business plan.

There is no one set way of structuring a business plan or of compiling its contents, nor any standard benchmark on how many pages it should be in length. However, you should always try to make it as concise and succinct as possible.

There are certain aspects that should always be included in a community building business plan:

1. [Executive summary](#): to provide a summary of your plan that you can share more widely.
2. [About our community building](#): to build a shared understanding of the building's origins, condition and governance as a foundation for future planning.
3. [Our vision, mission and objectives](#): to set out what you are trying to achieve.
4. [Our community \(users, needs and market\)](#): to assess who uses the building now, who could use it in future and how well it meets community needs.
5. [Our offer, services and activities](#): to evaluate existing services, identify gaps and explore opportunities to expand or improve what the building offers.
6. [Marketing and promotion](#): to review how the building is promoted and identify ways to reach more people and increase visibility.
7. [Management and governance](#): to ensure the building is well-managed, with the right people, skills and systems in place for effective governance.
8. [Our finances](#): to understand the building's financial position and plan for long-term sustainability and income generation.
9. [Maintenance planning](#): to prepare for future building improvements and ensure environmental and financial sustainability.
10. [Identifying and managing risks](#): to identify potential risks and put plans in place to reduce their impact and strengthen resilience.
11. [Securing the future \(growth and long-term plans\)](#): to plan for the building's continued relevance, financial health and community impact over the coming years.
12. [Action plan](#): to turn ideas into clear, achievable tasks with responsibilities, timelines and success measures.

These 12 areas are the essentials of any business plan. The remainder of this guide looks in more detail at each of these 12 essential components in turn. Working through each section in turn will help you build the foundations of your business plan.

Section 1: Executive summary

Purpose of this section

The Executive summary should give a clear, short overview of your business plan. Imagine someone only has 5 minutes to read it, what are the key points they must know?

Write this section last, once you have completed the rest of the plan. Keep it concise (1–2 pages maximum). This will then give you a summary of your plan, which you can share with funders, partners or the wider community.

Ensure you cover the following questions:

- What is your building and its purpose in one sentence?
- What is your long-term vision?
- What are your key objectives over the next 3–5 years?
- What services and activities do you currently provide?
- Who benefits most from your building?
- What is your financial situation now (main income and main costs)?
- What are your biggest challenges or risks?
- What opportunities will you focus on to grow or sustain the building?
- What support or investment do you need to achieve your plans (if applicable)?

Section 2: About our community building

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee build a clear and shared understanding of the community building's current situation, strengths and challenges. By reflecting on these questions, you'll uncover valuable insights into the building's history, governance, facilities and role in the community.

This will support better decision-making, help identify areas for improvement and ensures that future plans are grounded in a realistic view of what the building offers and what it needs. It also helps clarify responsibilities, celebrate achievements and highlight opportunities to strengthen the building's impact and sustainability.

Spend a little time discussing these questions:

Background and history

- When was the building established?
- Who owns the building (charitable trust, local council, church)?
- What condition is the building in? Have there been any major refurbishments or changes?
- Is there any relevant history to note or any restrictions on use?

Governance and management

- Who manages the day-to-day running of the building?
- How many trustees are there and what roles do they hold?
- Do you have the right people with the right skill sets on your management committee?
- Are there any paid staff or is it fully volunteer-run?
- Have any quality standards been gained, such as Hallmark?

Facilities and assets

- What facilities does the building have (e.g. hall, kitchen, toilets, stage, meeting rooms, outdoor space)?
- How many people can the spaces hold?
- Are there any specialist facilities (e.g. Wi-Fi, sound system, disabled access, storage)?
- How accessible is the community building?
- How environmentally sustainable is the community building?

Community role

- What is the building used for now? List regular bookings and activities.
- Who benefits most from the building at present (e.g. families, older people, local groups, businesses)?
- How important is the building to the community? Could people access similar facilities elsewhere?
- Are there any other stakeholders and what is their relationship to the community building (a stakeholder is defined as anyone affected by the activities of the organisation)?

Future needs

- Are there gaps in facilities that limit its use (e.g. parking, heating, accessibility, storage)?
- What improvements might make the building more useful or attractive?

Section 3: Our vision, mission and objectives

Purpose of this section

Spending time on these questions will help your management committee clarify what you want your community building to achieve, both now and in the future. By discussing your vision, mission, and objectives, you'll develop a shared understanding of your building's purpose, who it serves, and the values that guide your work. This process ensures everyone is working towards the same goals, helps you communicate your aims clearly to funders and the wider community, and provides a strong foundation for decision-making and planning. Ultimately, it will make your business plan more focused, meaningful, and effective in supporting your building's long-term success.

Vision

- What is your long-term vision for the building?
- How do you want the building to contribute to community life in 10 years' time?

Mission

- What is the purpose of your building?
- Who is it for and what role does it play in the community?
- How does your mission link to your governing document or charitable objects (if relevant)?

Objectives

- **Financial sustainability**
 - How will you ensure the building generates enough income to cover its costs?
 - What new income opportunities will you explore?
- **Community engagement**
 - How will you attract more people to use the building?
 - How will you make sure it meets the needs of different groups in your community?
- **Building maintenance and development**
 - What improvements, repairs or upgrades are needed in the short, medium and long term?
 - How will you make sure the building is safe, accessible and welcoming?
- **Governance and people**
 - How will you strengthen your management committee?
 - How will you ensure there are enough volunteers and the right skills to manage the building in future?

Section 4: Our community (users, needs and market)

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee understand who currently uses the community building, who could use it in future and how well it meets local needs. By exploring these questions, you'll gain a clearer picture of the building's value to the community, its income potential and areas for growth. It encourages you to think strategically about user engagement, identify gaps in provision and assess how your building compares to other local venues.

Completing a SWOT analysis and identifying your Unique Selling Point will help you plan for long-term sustainability and ensure your building remains relevant, inclusive, and responsive to changing community needs.

Current users

- Who currently uses the building (groups, individuals organisations)?
- How often is the building used (weekly, monthly, seasonally)?
- Which activities bring in the most income?
- Which groups or activities bring the most benefit to the community?

Potential users

- Who could use the building in future but does not currently?
- What gaps exist in community provision locally that your building could help fill?
- Are there groups that have stopped using the building? If so, why?
- What feedback have you had from the community about facilities or services they would like?

Community needs

- What are the main needs in your community (e.g. childcare, social activities, exercise, digital access, affordable space)?
- How does the building help to meet these needs now?
- What additional needs could it meet in the future?
- Are there particular groups (older people, young people, new residents, minority groups) who could benefit more from the building?

Competitors and alternatives

- What other venues or spaces are available nearby?
- How do their facilities, prices and availability compare to yours?
- Why would someone choose your building over alternatives?
- Are there opportunities to work together with other venues rather than compete?

Opportunities and challenges

- What changes in the local community might affect demand for your building (e.g. new housing developments, an ageing population, changes in public transport)? You may wish to use of local demographic data, surveys or consultation results to evidence need and demand.

- What wider trends might influence usage (e.g. more home working, cost of living pressures, interest in sustainable spaces)?
- What threats could affect your building's usage (e.g. competing venues, rising costs, fewer volunteers)?

SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis – which stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats - will help you to understand all the things, good and bad, that could affect your community building. If you know what these are, you can work out how to resolve them or use them to your advantage.

- **Strengths** are the things that make your community building special. They may include your unique offer to the community, your funding and the skills of the management committee and/or staff team.
- **Weaknesses** are the areas in which your community building is not so well resourced. You can identify your weaknesses by looking at other community buildings and comparing/ contrasting their strengths against your own. Weaknesses might include underdeveloped business skills, lack of access to funding, location, lack of publicity and so on.
- **Opportunities** relate to factors outside the community building that can allow it to develop. This might include the prospect of partnering up with another organisation to jointly provide services or the launch of a new funding programme.
- **Threats** are the opposite of opportunities and refer to the negative pressures in the outside world that endanger your community building's future. Threats might include lack of demand for your hireable space or new competitors.

Strengths Internal factors that offer an advantage	Weaknesses Internal factors that present a disadvantage
Opportunities External factors that require action to bring benefits	Threats External factors that may damage the business if no action is taken

Unique Selling Point (USP)

Finally, think about your community building's Unique Selling Point (USP). Your USP is the thing that makes your community building different from your competitors. It might be specific to your facilities you offer or it might relate to the way you run your building. It would be the reason that hirers stopped using a different community building and became your customer. Be specific and avoid clichés, such as, better customer service or cheaper hire rates. Consider how you will show your customers that you are the better choice.

If you can't think of a USP you need to review and improve your community building so that there is something that makes you different or better than your competitors.

Section 5: Our offer, services and activities

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee take stock of the services currently offered through the community building and explore opportunities for growth and improvement. By considering usage patterns, accessibility and future activities, you'll gain insight into how well the building serves the community and where there may be untapped potential. It also encourages you to think about inclusivity, partnerships and how to make the most of your resources.

This reflection will support more strategic planning, help you prioritise new initiatives and ensure the building continues to meet evolving community needs in a sustainable and welcoming way.

Current services

- What facilities do you hire out (e.g. main hall, meeting rooms, kitchen, outdoor space)?
- What community services are currently based in the building (e.g. food bank, youth group, exercise classes, health services)?
- Which activities or services generate the most regular income?

Usage patterns

- At what times of day or week is the building busiest?
- Are there times when the building is underused?
- Are there seasonal variations in use (e.g. summer events, winter clubs)?

Future activities

- What new services, activities or events would you like to introduce?
- How will these meet community needs or attract new users?
- What resources (volunteers, equipment, partnerships) will be needed to make them happen?

Accessibility and inclusivity

- How do you make sure your building and services are accessible to everyone (e.g. people with disabilities, different age groups, low-income families)?
- Are there specific groups you want to reach more effectively?

Partnership opportunities

- Are there organisations, businesses or local services you could partner with to deliver activities?
- What could you offer them and what could they bring to the community through your building?

Section 6: Marketing and promotion

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee evaluate how effectively the community building is promoted and how well it connects with local residents. By reviewing current marketing approaches, digital presence and community engagement, you can identify what's working, where improvements are needed and how to reach priority audiences more effectively. It also encourages you to think about your building's identity, visibility and partnerships, helping you develop a clearer strategy for attracting users and increasing bookings. Measuring success and refining your approach ensures your building remains well-used, well-known and valued within the community.

Current approaches

- How do you currently promote your building (e.g. posters, word of mouth, social media, website, local newsletters)?
- Which methods have been most effective in attracting bookings?
- What marketing activities do you no longer use and why?

Reaching your community

- How do local residents usually find out what's happening at your building?
- Are there groups in the community who may not know about the building or what it offers?
- How can you make your building more visible to new residents or people moving into the area?

Target audiences

- Who are your priority users (e.g. families, older people, businesses, voluntary groups)?
- What messages will appeal to each group?
- What channels (social media, flyers, school links, local business networks) are best for reaching them?

Digital presence

- Do you have a website? If so, is it up to date, clear and easy to use?
- Do you use social media? Which platforms and how often do you post?
- Can people check availability, book rooms or contact you online?

Partnerships and networks

- Can local businesses, schools or health providers help promote your building?
- Could you cross-promote with other community venues or groups?
- Do you have links with parish or district councils who could help raise awareness?

Branding and identity

- Do you have a logo, strapline or clear identity for your building?
- Does your publicity material (online and offline) look consistent and professional?
- How do you want people to feel when they see your publicity?

Measuring success

- How do you know if your marketing is working (e.g. tracking enquiries, monitoring website visits, asking new users how they heard about you)?
- How often do you review and refresh your marketing approach?
- What small changes could you try in the next year to boost visibility?

Section 7: Management and governance

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee reflect on how the community building is governed and run, and whether the current structure supports long-term sustainability. By exploring roles, responsibilities, skills and volunteer involvement, you can identify strengths and gaps in your team and ensure good governance practices are in place.

It also encourages forward planning, succession strategies, and stronger links with external partners. Understanding your management structure helps build resilience, improves decision-making and ensures the building is well-managed, inclusive and prepared for future challenges.

Management structure

- Who is legally responsible for the building (trustees, management committee, parish council, other)?
- How many trustees or committee members do you currently have?
- What roles do they hold (chair, treasurer, secretary, bookings officer, etc.)?
- How are decisions made (e.g. at committee meetings, delegated sub-groups)?
- Do you have paid staff (caretaker, cleaner, administrator) or is everything run by volunteers?

Skills and capacity

- What skills and experience do your trustees/committee bring?
- Are there any skills missing that would help manage the building more effectively (e.g. finance, marketing, IT, fundraising)?
- How do you support new trustees or committee members to understand their responsibilities?
- Do you provide training or mentoring for trustees, staff or volunteers?

Volunteers

- How many active volunteers do you have (beyond the committee)?
- What roles do volunteers carry out (maintenance, cleaning, running events, fundraising)?
- How do you recruit and retain volunteers?
- Do you have a system to thank and recognise their contributions?

Governance practices

- Do you have a constitution or governing document? Is it up to date?
- Do you review policies regularly (health and safety, safeguarding, booking terms, complaints)?
- Do you keep clear financial records and report them to trustees/committee members regularly?
- How often does the committee/board meet and are meetings effective?

Succession planning

- What would happen if a key trustee or officer stepped down suddenly?

- Do you have potential new trustees or volunteers identified?
- How do you encourage younger or newer residents to get involved in governance?
- Do you use co-option, sub-committees or advisory roles to bring in new people?

External relationships

- Do you have good links with your parish council, local authority or other community organisations?
- How do you keep your community informed about decisions affecting the building?
- Are there opportunities to strengthen governance by linking with other local venues or charities?

Section 8: Our finances

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee assess the financial health and sustainability of the community building. By reviewing income sources, expenditure, financial management practices and future opportunities, you can identify strengths and risks in your current approach.

It encourages forward planning, better budgeting and more strategic thinking about income generation. Understanding your financial position helps ensure the building remains viable, resilient to change and able to meet community needs both now and in the future.

Current income

- What are your main sources of income (hall hire, fundraising, grants, donations, contracts, trading activities)?
- Which income sources are reliable year to year?
- Are you reliant on one or two major sources? What risks does this create?
- Do you set hire charges at a level that covers your costs?
- Do you review your charges regularly and compare them with other local venues?

Current expenditure

- What are your main running costs (utilities, insurance, cleaning, maintenance, staff or volunteer expenses)?
- Are there any significant one-off costs coming up (e.g. repairs, refurbishment, equipment replacement)?
- Do you review energy use, contracts and suppliers to make sure you are getting best value?

Financial management

- Who is responsible for managing your accounts?
- Do you produce regular financial reports for trustees/committee members?
- Do you have a budget each year and how closely do you monitor against it?
- Do you hold adequate reserves to cover unexpected costs or loss of income?
- Do you have a policy on how much you aim to hold in reserves?

Future income generation

- What new income sources could you develop (e.g. new services, more hires, partnerships, grants)?
- Do you have opportunities to increase fundraising or sponsorship?
- Could you run new events or activities that both benefit the community and generate income?
- Are there opportunities for trading activities (e.g. running a café, renting office space, offering co-working)?

Financial sustainability

- Do you know your “break-even point”, the minimum income you need each year to cover your costs?

- What steps could you take if income dropped suddenly (e.g. reducing costs, drawing on reserves, emergency fundraising)?
- How will you make sure the building is financially viable in 3–5 years' time?
- Have you considered longer-term financial planning (e.g. maintenance fund, sinking fund for major repairs)?

Monitoring and forecasting

- Do you prepare forecasts for income and expenditure over the next 1–3 years?
- What assumptions do you make in your forecasts (e.g. energy costs, usage levels, grants)?
- How often do you review whether those assumptions are still realistic?
- What tools or templates do you use to track income and spending (e.g. spreadsheets, accounting software, treasurer's reports)?

Section 9: Maintenance planning

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee take a long-term view of the building's upkeep, sustainability and future development. By identifying major components, planning for capital expenditure and considering environmental improvements, you can ensure the building remains safe, functional and fit for purpose in the years ahead.

It also encourages forward-thinking around financial planning, eco-friendly practices, and future-proofing to meet changing community needs. This reflection supports responsible stewardship and helps build a resilient, modern community space that continues to serve local people well into the future.

Long-term planning

- What are the major elements of your building (roof, heating, electrics, kitchen, toilets, windows, flooring)?
- How old are they and when are they likely to need replacing or refurbishment?
- Do you keep a schedule or log of when work is due?
- What improvements would you like to make to modernise the building in the next 5–10 years?

Capital expenditure

- What major costs do you expect in the next 1, 3, 5 and 10 years?
- Do you have a reserves or “sinking fund” to help cover these costs?
- Have you had quotes or surveys done for any major works?
- What grant or fundraising opportunities could you explore to help with these costs?

Environmental sustainability

- How energy efficient is your building now?
- What improvements could you make (insulation, LED lighting, solar panels, heat pumps, water saving measures)?
- Could you access grants or community energy schemes to help?
- How do you encourage users to be eco-friendly (recycling, waste reduction, turning off lights/heating)?
- Do you have an environmental policy or ambitions to become a “green” community building?

Future proofing

- How will these improvements help make the building more attractive and affordable to users?
- How will you balance financial sustainability with environmental sustainability?
- How will you track progress over time?

Section 10: Identifying and managing risks

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee identify and prepare for risks that could affect the community building's operations, finances, governance and long-term sustainability. By thinking through potential challenges - from financial pressures and maintenance issues to volunteer turnover and emergency situations - you can put practical plans in place to reduce their impact. It also encourages regular review of risks, better record-keeping and stronger resilience to change.

Completing a risk register supports responsible management and helps ensure the building remains safe, secure and adaptable for the future.

Identifying risks

- What are the biggest risks your building faces? (e.g. loss of major income source, rising utility costs, sudden repair needs, decline in volunteer numbers)
- Are there external risks (e.g. new competing venue, changes in council funding, changes in regulations)?
- Are there internal risks (e.g. lack of succession planning, gaps in skills, poor record-keeping)?

Financial resilience

- What would happen if a major booking was cancelled or a grant ended?
- How would you cope if energy prices rose sharply or insurance costs increased?
- Do you have financial reserves and how many months of running costs do they cover?
- Do you have more than one income source or are you dependent on just one or two?

Building and maintenance risks

- What are the main risks associated with your building (e.g. roof repairs, heating failure, accessibility issues)?
- Do you have a regular maintenance plan to reduce the chance of sudden big costs?
- Do you have up-to-date safety checks (fire, electrical, gas, health and safety)?

People and governance risks

- What would happen if your chairperson, treasurer or bookings officer stepped down suddenly?
- Do you have enough trustees and volunteers to keep the building running?
- Do you have clear role descriptions and succession plans?
- Are policies (safeguarding, health and safety, complaints) reviewed regularly and understood by all?

Emergency planning

- Do you have a plan for what to do if the building has to close temporarily (e.g. flood, fire, heating failure)?
- Do you have insurance cover for key risks (public liability, buildings, contents, events, employers' liability)?
- How would you communicate quickly with users if there was an emergency?

Adapting to change

- How will you adapt if community needs change (e.g. more demand for digital access, fewer parties, more fitness classes)?
- Are you prepared for wider changes (e.g. demographic shifts, climate change impacts, funding changes)?
- Do you regularly review risks and update your business plan accordingly?

Risk register

Complete the following table:

- List your main risks down the first column.
- Be realistic but not alarmist about likelihood and impact.
- Write down what the actual effect would be if it happened (not just “bad”).
- Add practical actions you can take now to reduce the risk.
- Allocate responsibility so risks don’t get forgotten.

Risk	Likelihood (Low / Medium / High)	Impact (Low / Medium / High)	What would happen if this risk occurred?	What actions can we take to prevent or reduce it?	Who is responsible for monitoring this risk?
Example: Loss of major hirer	Medium	High	Loss of £2,000 per year income	Diversify income; review pricing; seek new bookings	Treasurer and Bookings Officer
Example: Roof leak	Low	High	Building unusable; costly repairs	Regular inspections; build a sinking fund	Maintenance Subcommittee
Example: Chair resigns suddenly	Medium	Medium	Leadership gap; meetings disrupted	Identify deputy; succession planning	Committee

We recommend that you agree a schedule for reviewing your risk register (e.g. quarterly) to ensure it remains current, that agreed actions are delivered and that no new risks have emerged that need attention.

Section 11: Securing the future (growth and long-term plans)

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee think strategically about the long-term viability of the community building. By exploring financial resilience, environmental sustainability, governance and community relevance, you can identify practical steps to secure the building's future.

It encourages diversification of income, better use of resources and stronger engagement with users and volunteers. Reflecting on these questions supports proactive planning, helps avoid over-reliance on any one area and ensures the building remains adaptable, inclusive and financially stable for years to come.

Long-term viability

- How will you ensure the building continues to cover its costs year after year?
- Do you have a reserves policy to build financial stability?
- What steps can you take to reduce reliance on one or two income sources?
- How will you keep hire charges fair but also sufficient to meet rising costs?

Increasing usage and income

- How could you make better use of underused times (daytimes, weekdays, off-season)?
- Are there new audiences you could attract (e.g. home workers, local businesses, young families)?
- Could you diversify income through events, fundraising, sponsorship or partnerships?
- Could you explore trading opportunities (e.g. café, co-working, social enterprise activity)?

Environmental sustainability

- What measures could reduce energy costs (e.g. LED lighting, insulation, solar panels)?
- How do you minimise waste and encourage recycling at events and activities?
- Could you access funding for “green” improvements to the building?
- How can you show your community that you are contributing to climate action?

People and governance sustainability

- How will you ensure a strong pipeline of trustees and volunteers?
- How do you make sure new people feel welcomed and supported to get involved?
- Do you review your committee's skills regularly and plan for succession?
- How do you avoid over-reliance on one or two key individuals?

Community relevance

- How will you keep checking that the building is meeting community needs?
- Do you carry out surveys, consultations or feedback exercises with users?
- How will you adapt if community priorities change (e.g. digital access, loneliness, youth provision)?
- Could you build stronger partnerships with local organisations to stay relevant?

Growth and development

- Are there plans to expand, refurbish or improve the building in the next 3–5 years?
- How will you fund and manage those improvements?
- Could you scale up activities to generate more impact and income?
- What opportunities exist to work with other community buildings or share resources?

Section 12: Action plan

Purpose of this section

This section helps the management committee turn ideas and reflections into a practical, achievable plan. By identifying clear priorities, assigning responsibilities and setting realistic timelines, you can ensure that progress is made and resources are used effectively.

An action plan encourages accountability, helps track success and supports both short-term actions and longer-term goals. A well-structured action plan keeps everyone focused, aligned, and motivated to improve the building and its role in the community.

Guiding questions

- What are the top priorities for the next 12 months?
- Which medium- and long-term objectives (2–5 years) should you start preparing for now?
- Who will take responsibility for each action?
- What resources (money, people, partnerships) will be needed?
- How will you know when each action has been completed successfully?

Example action plan template

Objective	Action	Who is responsible?	By when?	Resources needed	How will success be measured?
Example: Improve financial sustainability	Review hire charges and compare with other venues	Treasurer + Committee	March 2026	Booking data, local price comparisons	Updated charges agreed and communicated
Example: Strengthen governance	Recruit two new trustees with finance and IT skills	Chair + Trustees	September 2026	Volunteer recruitment networks, word of mouth	Two new trustees appointed
Example: Increase community engagement	Run a community survey to gather ideas for new activities	Secretary + Volunteer group	June 2026	Online survey tool, flyers, hall open day	Minimum 50 responses collected

This section should be reviewed at every management committee meeting so trustees can track progress and adjust priorities when needed.

Purpose of this section

This section provides practical guidance on how to present your business plan clearly and professionally. A well-structured, easy-to-read document helps trustees, funders and community members understand your goals and priorities. By keeping the content concise, using plain English, and applying consistent formatting, you make the plan more accessible and useful. Including tables, appendices and a clear layout ensures key information is easy to find and update, supporting better decision-making and ongoing management of your community building.

Length and style

- Keep it concise, it doesn't need to be a long document.
- Use bullet points where possible. Clarity is preferred over lengthy text.
- Avoid jargon and write in plain English.

Structure

- Number your pages so people can refer back easily.
- Include a cover page stating the name of the community building, the fact that the document is a business plan, the month and year of publication, and the business plan timeframe.
- Include a contents page at the start with section titles and page numbers.
- Use clear headings for each section so the reader can quickly find information.

Presentation

- Choose a simple, easy-to-read font (e.g. Aptos, Arial, Calibri).
- Use the same font and size throughout to keep it consistent.
- Leave enough white space, don't try to cram too much text onto a page.

Tables and templates

- Use tables for things like action plans, risk registers and budgets. They make complex information easier to read.
- Keep tables simple, without too many colours or graphics.

Appendices

- Put detailed documents (e.g. financial forecasts, survey results, floor plans) in an appendix at the back.
- Refer to them in the main text so the reader knows where to look.

Updating the plan

- Update the date on the front cover each time you review the plan.
- Save the plan in an easy-to-access folder for all trustees.
- You may wish to keep a printed copy for meetings, but store the main version digitally so it can be updated easily.

Contact Cambridgeshire ACRE for further help, guidance and signposting on business planning for your community building. Contact us on 01353 860850 or enquiries@cambsacre.org.uk for more information and templates.

Final checklist

Purpose of this section

Before you finalise your business plan, use this checklist to make sure the key points have been included. You don't need pages of detail, short answers are fine, as long as they are clear.

About the building

- ☐ Have we described our building, its history and its role in the community?
- ☐ Have we listed our facilities and what makes us different from other venues?

Vision and objectives

- ☐ Have we set out our long-term vision and purpose?
- ☐ Do we have clear short, medium and long-term objectives?

Community and market

- ☐ Have we identified who currently uses the building and who could use it in future?
- ☐ Have we thought about community needs and how our building meets them?
- ☐ Have we completed a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)?

Services and activities

- ☐ Have we described what we currently offer?
- ☐ Have we identified new activities or services we could provide?

Marketing and promotion

- ☐ Have we written down how we promote our building now?
- ☐ Do we have ideas for reaching new audiences?

Management and governance

- ☐ Have we explained who runs the building and how decisions are made?
- ☐ Have we identified any gaps in skills or succession plans?

Finance

- ☐ Have we listed our main income and expenditure?
- ☐ Do we know our break-even point?
- ☐ Have we thought about new income opportunities?

Building maintenance and investment

- ☐ Do we know when major repairs or upgrades will be needed (roof, heating, kitchen)?
- ☐ Have we considered how we will pay for them?
- ☐ Have we included ideas for making the building more energy efficient and eco-friendly?

Risks and resilience

- ☐ Have we identified the main risks (financial, building, people)?
- ☐ Do we have a risk register with actions to reduce those risks?

Future plans

- ☐ Have we thought about how to keep the building relevant and sustainable for the next 3–5 years?
- ☐ Have we included ambitions for growth or development?

Action plan

- ☐ Do we have a clear list of actions, who is responsible and when they need to be done?