BLACKBRIDGE

CHARITABLE COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETY

IMPACT REPORT

2025/2026



FOREWORD

"This was a big year for Blackbridge CCBS. The opening of the £7 million Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub was a milestone event after years of consultation, planning and building. As a Podsmead resident and a Director on the board, I have watched this initial idea transform from conversations around the table in The Ramblers Community Centre to reality. It now stands as a testament to what is possible when a community works together. From our 3G sports pitch and fitness gym to the upstairs studios and social space with the most fantastic view of Robinswood Hill, we have created an inclusive, accessible quarter for health and wellbeing right on our doorstep.

The true impact of Blackbridge CCBS goes far beyond bricks and mortar. It lives in the spaces we provide for our people. It is found in our expanded youth provision, where our dedicated youth team provides a safe, welcoming environment five nights a week and through initiatives like the Poets Pantry food club, which continues to offer much-needed support to families feeling the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. Meanwhile, innovative partnerships like the Heart of the Game health initiative and our urban greening collaborations with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust show that we are thinking about all aspects of health and what is needed to keep people well.

What makes Blackbridge CCBS truly unique is that it belongs to us. We are stakeholders, partners, and community owners. I am proud of what we have achieved so far, and I am grateful to everyone who helped us along the way. However, this is just the beginning of another chapter. There is a lot of work still to be done to help Podsmead reach it's potential. Trying to achieve lasting change when funding is difficult to acquire is not easy, but we are a community who don't give up easily. The opening of our new Pharmacy after 10 years of resident campaigning is proof of that.

I hope you enjoy reading this part of our story, here's to another vibrant and successful 12 months."



Isobel Johnson,
Podsmead Resident and Blackbridge CCBS Director

WHO WE ARE

Blackbridge Charitable Community Benefit Society (CCBS) is a community organisation supporting health and wellbeing; learning, skills and employment; youth work; and other community activities in the Podsmead area in Gloucester.

Established in 2021 with entirely charitable objectives and as part of the legacy of the Podsmead Big Local, Blackbridge CCBS also led the development of the brand new Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub which brings together sports, exercise, youth activities and other community facilities and opened in spring 2025.

OUR MISSION

We work alongside the people of Podsmead to strengthen connections, create opportunities and bring community spaces to life, helping residents of all ages to be active, learn, contribute and thrive.



A YEAR IN NUMBERS

YOUTH WORK



190
youth work sessions delivered

1,215
youth work contacts with young people recorded

66%
repeat engagement from young people returning to sessions and activities

5
youth work evenings a week at the Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub

HEALTH AND WELLBEING



314
active members of the Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub of which 40% are Podsmead residents

60k+
visits to the Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub

£30,000
additional funding leveraged to run the 'Heart of the Game' blood pressure awareness campaign in partnership with Freedom Leisure, the Gloucestershire Football Association, and Gloucester City AFC in 2026

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



4
'Local lives, Lasting health' engagement events in the community to bring residents together over food and activities and hear their opinions

12
Podsmead Action Workshops facilitated by Active Gloucestershire with community partners and residents

FOOD SUPPORT



40+
people visiting Poets Pantry every week for free food, emergency packages or discounted food bags

1,875
food bags provided by Poets Pantry to enable Podsmead residents to access good-quality food for a contribution of £3

YOUTH WORK:

Building Confidence, Friendships and Inclusion

Since opening in April 2025 and through the work of the Blackbridge CCBS Youth Work Team, the Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub has grown into a trusted centre for youth and community development.

The team now run five youth work evenings a week, including smaller sessions for youth voice and targeted wellbeing, alongside three open access youth nights where everyone is welcome to come and be who they want to be.

Working in partnership with organisations like Gloucestershire Gateway Trust, we also work to find opportunities to help young people develop their employability skills through initiatives like Bridging the Gap.

Building Quality from Day One

Blackbridge's youth provision achieved independent recognition through the Youth Investment Fund Quality Standards, receiving Excellent ratings for Active Participation and Youth Work Practice, and Good for Governance and Leadership. A significant achievement for a youth service built from the ground up, recognising the strength of our inclusive practice, youth voice and commitment to high-quality youth work.



DANNY'S* STORY

We first met Danny when he was experiencing a significant period of change, having recently moved into a new foster placement, and his anxiety was particularly heightened.

His foster carer was keen to find an activity that would provide him with an opportunity to meet other young people, develop confidence and become involved in something enjoyable, and so Danny attended our Summer HAF Football Camps in 2025.

At his first session, he was extremely shy and withdrawn. He was nervous about being in an unfamiliar environment and around people he did not know. Staff spent time getting to know him, regularly checking in, providing reassurance and gently encouraging him to become involved without placing pressure on him. He would participate when an activity was taking place but was not yet comfortable with the social side of the sessions or initiating interaction with others.

By the end of the summer, there had been a noticeable improvement in his confidence and willingness to participate which led to his involvement with our Thursday Inclusion Group, and then also to Fit Fridays.

*Name changed to protect privacy

At first Danny was unsure how to kick a football and did not understand the basic rules of the game. Fit Fridays provided a supportive environment where he could learn new skills at his own pace.

"For Danny, Blackbridge has become more than somewhere to attend an activity. It has become a place where he feels safe, included, supported and able to be himself."

Over time, there was a significant development in both his physical confidence and his social skills. One of the most noticeable changes has been his ability to develop friendships and form positive relationships with other young people, including a close friendship group with three other young people who regularly attend.

Now, Danny actively engages, talks, laughs, jokes and has become increasingly confident in getting involved in activities as a group.

The Blackbridge Youth Team had the opportunity to support him through an important period of transition in his life, remaining a consistent and familiar environment for him, providing continuity, positive relationships and a place where he can feel comfortable and included.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Working in partnership with **Freedom Leisure**, together we opened the **Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub** at the end of April 2025. Freedom Leisure are a not-for-profit leisure trust who also manage other key fitness and wellbeing sites in Gloucester.

To mark the opening we held an exclusive preview evening for local residents, who are automatically offered discounted membership if they live in Podsmead. The following day we held a community open day which included a programme of free 'come and try' fitness classes, a youth football tournament on the brand new 3G pitch, plus free food, face painting and henna, and lots of giveaways and free passes. The event was attended by over 400 people.

Shortly after we welcomed a number of VIPs to the Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub including HRH Princess Royal to officially open the site and Stephanie Peacock MP (government Minister for Youth, Civil Society and Sport) who launched Fit Fridays.

Since opening, through our partnership with Freedom Leisure we have launched many new initiatives together to support health and wellbeing including Walking Football, the Blackbridge Bootbank, and Heart of the Game.



HEART OF THE GAME:
Impact of Pre-Activity Blood Pressure Checks

At Blackbridge, a series of blood pressure checks were introduced in the lead-up to walking football sessions as part of the Heart of the Game NHS prevention and wellbeing initiative. The aim was to support early identification of cardiovascular risk factors and encourage healthier lifestyle choices through community sport.

One participant, our Freedom Volunteer, Ken Blackburn (Head of Football Development, Tuffley Rovers FC and former professional footballer), shared his experience following several weeks of testing.

Despite a lifelong involvement in football and maintaining an active lifestyle at 74, Ken reflected that he had previously taken his health for granted. The routine blood pressure checks revealed slightly elevated readings, which acted as a meaningful prompt for change.

"Being an ex-professional footballer and still trying to keep fit and working at 74, I had been guilty of taking my health for granted. Not anymore. The slightly high readings have made me give more thought to my eating habits and alcohol intake. A big thank you for the foresight and care given to Blackbridge users."

Rather than causing concern, the results became a catalyst for positive action. Ken reported that the feedback encouraged him to re-evaluate key aspects of his lifestyle, particularly his diet and alcohol intake, and to take a more proactive approach to managing his long-term health. He described the initiative as a "thoughtful and forward-looking" approach and expressed appreciation for the care and foresight shown in embedding health checks within a familiar and welcoming sporting environment.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement and co-production are at the heart of everything we do.

In addition to youth work and food support, working with our partners we have also led or contributed to projects, initiatives, events and communications to enable and encourage Podsmead residents to engage however they want to with their local community. This has included:

- An Action Research Project that ran over nine months in partnership with the NHS Alliance and Local Trust to work towards improving the level of strategic statutory engagement from the NHS, Public Health and health trusts with neighbourhood partners and residents in Podsmead so that local provision is developed based on residents lived experience.
- This included four outreach events in the community where free food and activities were provided whilst feedback was sought from residents through simple questions. The events included a Glow Party on the Green and a Thanksgiving event with Play Gloucestershire, and two events at Tuffley Rovers which included free entry to a home match.
- Working in partnership with Freedom Leisure, Gloucestershire Football Association and Gloucester City AFC we launched the Heart of the Game project, a football-inspired community health initiative which aims to tackle undiagnosed hypertension through early intervention, accessible blood pressure testing, and the promotion of active, healthy lifestyles across Gloucestershire.
- Working with One Church Podsmead and Freedom Leisure, we were able to bring a new community café into the Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub, every Friday morning, everyone welcome.





- With the support of The Arts Council, we were able to put in place an Artist in Residence for Podsmead who worked with local residents to visualise and illustrate what activities residents could do to enhance their wellbeing.



- We utilised a range of summer fun days supported by HAF and other funders to consult with residents about health inequalities and the actions people want.
- We also supported the GGT Community Research 2026 which this year focused on gathering views on food, including access, availability and affordability of good quality healthy food. The research team gathered views of Podsmead residents at summer events, visits to Poets Pantry, community cafés and our youth clubs.
- We supported and promoted 12 Podsmead Action Workshops facilitated by Active Gloucestershire focused on Health Inequalities.

The workshops brought community partners and residents together to distil their neighbourhood work into the themes of Health and Wellbeing, Community Action and Projects, Community Awareness and Communications.

- After a long-standing campaign by the community we were delighted to support and encourage residents to engage with the new Podsmead Chemist and utilise its new local services.
- And to ensure all residents could stay in touch with what was happening, we produced and distributed 3,000 copies of our newsletter Blackbridge News to local households sharing good news, progress on projects and new opportunities for residents to get involved in community activities.



POETS PANTRY:

Making a difference in our community

Poets Pantry provides accessible, affordable and emergency food support to people and families across the local community and is managed by Blackbridge CCBS.

The pantry opens three times a week, with two sessions offering free food which has been collected mainly from local supermarkets, and a third session which offers residents the opportunity to buy a pre-filled bag with a selection of fresh and packaged food to suit their needs for a small contribution of £3 or less.

The Poets Pantry volunteers are also on hand to help anyone who is struggling to pay for their bag with emergency food support.

Since the Covid-19 Pandemic, Poets Pantry has:

- **Grown the Food Club to 40 members**, helping local people access good-quality food at a reduced cost.
- **Provided approximately 35 to 37 food bags each week**, helping households make their food budgets go further.
- **Distributed approximately 1 to 2 emergency food bags a month**, supporting people experiencing unexpected financial hardship or food insecurity.
- **Received weekly donations from 7 to 8 organisations**, including local businesses, community groups and other partners, helping to keep the pantry stocked and sustainable.
- **Signposted residents to other organisations** who can help to tackle wider needs such as debt and wellbeing advice.

These figures demonstrate not only the scale of demand for Poets Pantry, but also the strength of the community response behind it. Through affordable food, emergency support and connections with local organisations, the pantry helps people through difficult periods while providing a welcoming and non-judgemental place to access support.





ALICE'S* STORY

Having lived in Podsmead since 1998, Alice has been part of the local community for many years. She began coming to Poets Pantry in 2024, at a time when the rising cost of living was putting increasing pressure on her finances.

As well as managing her own household costs, she regularly cares for her grandchildren, bringing additional expenses and responsibilities. With health problems preventing her from working, and difficulties caused by changes to the benefits system, she found herself in a particularly difficult financial situation.

"Being a member saves me a lot of money, and the bags are great value for money."

At one point, she had to borrow money while waiting for her benefits, leaving her with further financial hardship. She describes herself as being "the poorest and worst off I have ever been."

Becoming a member of Poets Pantry's Food Club has helped ease some of that pressure. She pays £1.50 a week for a bag of groceries, which she describes as great value for money and says saves her a significant amount compared with buying the same food elsewhere. Her bags are also personalised to meet her dietary requirements, something she appreciates greatly, and which helps ensure that the food she receives is suitable for her individual needs.

*Name changed to protect privacy

She also benefits from the twice-weekly free food service, providing additional support when household finances are particularly stretched.

For her, the impact goes beyond simply reducing the weekly food bill. The Christmas hampers and holiday meal boxes have been particularly meaningful because they give her an opportunity to cook with her grandchildren and enjoy time together as a family.

She says she would love to see more opportunities like this available regularly, as she feels that cooking together gives families the chance to spend time together, try different foods and create positive experiences despite the financial pressures they may be facing.

Her experience demonstrates the wider impact of Poets Pantry: helping people facing financial hardship to access affordable food that meets their individual needs, reducing pressure on household budgets, and providing opportunities for families to share food and spend quality time together.



COMMUNITY LEARNING

Working in partnership with other local organisations including Gloucestershire Gateway Trust and through funded projects such as SPARK, we have been able to offer a range of learning opportunities for Podsmead residents aged 16+ including:

- Art groups
- Rowing
- Literacy and numeracy
- Children and Family Centre courses
- Wellbeing at the Hub
- Growing activities on the community allotment
- Youth Work training
- Employability training including Bridging the Gap



PARTNERSHIPS

We know that we are stronger together, and so during the last year we have been particularly focused on building and investing in the Podsmead Partnership. The partnership includes local organisations, service providers, employers, community partners and most importantly, residents. Together the partnership forms the primary neighbourhood infrastructure in the area which enables all residents and local partners to collectively take a 'whole neighbourhood' approach, working together on priorities to improve quality of life in the area.

In addition, partnerships with sports clubs such as the Gloucester Athletics track (adjacent to the Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub), Rugby for Heroes (now based at the Hub), and Tuffley Rovers FC have also strengthened. Other community assets such as the new Podsmead Chemist, the Lighthouse and The Oaks Children and Family Centres and social landlords have all also improved during this period, collectively bringing better services to Podsmead.

The result of this is improved co-operation between partners and residents over the past year. Rebuilding confidence and participation in local partnerships remains a key priority following the collapse of multiple regeneration proposals for Podsmead in the past five years.

Podsmead
PARTNERSHIP

OUR FUTURE GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS

1. Continue building participation and ownership of the Podsmead Partnership by local residents and community partners so that it is recognised and utilised as the primary social infrastructure in the area which can identify, support and help deliver the priority improvements that residents want in the neighbourhood.
2. Grow the community building capacity of Blackbridge CCBS so that it can fulfil its developing role as the community anchor organisation in Podsmead.
3. Support the Podsmead Partnership to co-create a new Neighbourhood Plan based on residents and community partners priorities to ensure local voices are clearly heard.
4. Reduce health inequalities.
5. Increase the range and number of wellbeing and learning opportunities available locally.
6. Increase the numbers and confidence of residents to participate in and lead the Podsmead Partnership, Blackbridge CCBS and other community action groups.
7. Co-create and continuously update a whole neighbourhood offer by developing provision collectively wherever possible and by sharing plans for local activities throughout our connected networks.





A THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS

To make it possible to realise the community vision and build the Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub in response to the lack of primary care provision in Podsmead, over the last three years Blackbridge CCBS has secured almost £7 million of capital support from Gloucester City Council Section 106, the Football Foundation, Sport England, the government's Youth Investment Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Primary Care Trust (ICB predecessor) plus Community Infrastructure Levy support from the local Joint Core Strategy.

Now the Hub is open Blackbridge CCBS is focused on securing the necessary revenue funding to support its activities and the delivery of neighbourhood priorities.

Gloucestershire Gateway Trust is now the primary revenue funder, providing £100,000 per year to fund the Blackbridge CCBS Youth Work Team. This funding is generated by GGT's shareholding in the Gloucester Services business and the trust is committed to continuing to provide this support at least until 2029.

Thank you also to Freedom Leisure, the Arts Council, Active Gloucestershire, Gloucester Youth Network, Gloucester HAF, Local Trust and NHS Alliance, and Household Support Fund who have also provided support and funding for specific projects.



BLACKBRIDGE

CHARITABLE COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETY

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