

the Bristol Method:
**how to use
partnerships to
drive change**

BRISTOL
2015 EUROPEAN
GREEN CAPITAL



Contents

Introduction	3
What is the Bristol Green Capital Partnership?	4
How is it governed?	5
How is it funded?	7
What has it achieved?	8
Advice on how to set up a partnership	9
Different perspectives	11
What other partnerships are there in Bristol?	12

Introduction

Bristol is famous for its large concentration of residents who are engaged with and passionate about being “green”; people living so-called alternative lifestyles are not so alternative here. The city is home to a number of national green organisations (such as the Soil Association and Sustrans) as well as many smaller, grassroots or community organisations that are committed to advancing sustainable living.

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All this human energy and enthusiasm is the reason that Bristol is the European Green Capital in 2015: people came together and worked hard to change the city, and are still doing so. They worked in partnership, collaborating to achieve shared goals by building on each other’s strengths, and sharing skills and knowledge. There is strength in numbers and when people collaborate, the effectiveness of the group is often greater than each person’s effectiveness when acting alone. Or, as Aristotle famously put it: the whole is worth more than the sum of its parts.

This module looks at the unique power that cross-sector partnerships have, and how they bring like-minded people together to inspire and enable cooperation and the sharing of knowledge. We define partnerships here as a group of organisations or individuals that formally collaborate under a shared banner for mutually beneficial outcomes.

The intended audience is people in other cities who are considering formalising existing partnership networks or who wish to create something from scratch. This module therefore covers the process for establishing a partnership as well as a summary of some of the challenges and barriers that they can face.

The largest and most unique partnership in this area is the Bristol Green Capital Partnership (BGCP), and it is given the space it deserves in the pages that follow. The module covers how and why it was established and its various stages of development. Most usefully, the people involved have shared what they believe made it successful, helping readers to replicate or adapt the model for use in their own region.

In addition to the BGCP, Bristol benefits from numerous other partnerships which have moved the green agenda forward. This module makes no attempt to share an exhaustive list but, in the spirit of sharing information which others will find useful, we include here brief summaries about four issue-focussed partnerships: the Bristol Energy Network; Bristol Food Network; Solar City; and Transition Bristol.



What is the Bristol Green Capital Partnership?

Bristol has an extraordinary breadth and depth of expertise and ideas on green issues. The Bristol Green Capital Partnership brings these people together to celebrate and promote new ways of thinking, acting and enabling change towards a low carbon city future. Members are committed to acting collectively for the benefit of the city.

The Bristol Green Capital Partnership (BGCP) was instigated by Bristol City Council in 2007 with the aim of creating a platform for organisations to join together to develop the concept and delivery of Bristol as a 'green' city. It hosted an event, inviting organisations from all sectors to pledge their dedication to making Bristol a 'low-carbon city with a high quality of life'.

still hotly debated, but people agree that it would not have happened without a fertile group of active people outside the council, and it would not have happened without the council's vision and backing.

www.bristolgreencapital.org

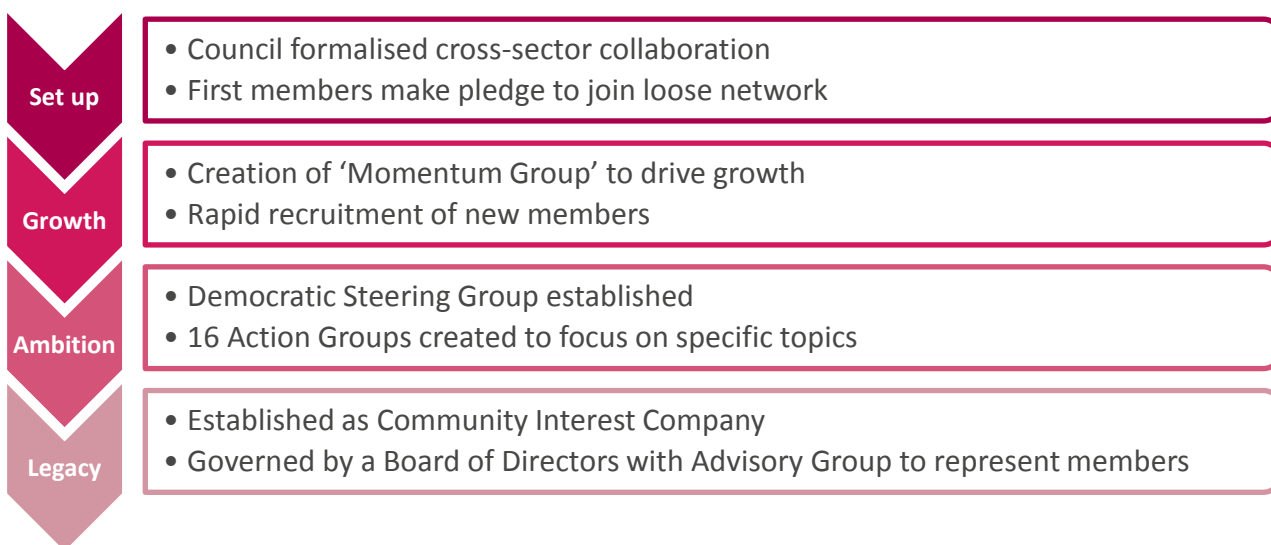
However, as a sustainability manager from another UK city council once said "you can't just invent a Partnership". That's largely true. Some of the BGCP's leading figures were gathering as far back as 2006 to agitate for change. The precise genesis of the BGCP is



The first Members of the BGCP take the pledge

How is the Bristol Green Capital Partnership governed?

During the eight years that the BGCP has so far been active, a number of governance models have been explored – all of which offer useful learnings for a city wanting to develop its own Partnership.



Set up (2007)

Founded in 2007, the first 12 members of the BGCP were an excellent representation of all sectors: local government; multinational corporations; small businesses; education and third sector. Many more rapidly followed and, in 2015, the partnership has more than 700 members. At least half are from the private sector, about 40% are from the third sector, and the remainder comes from the public sector. Members share experience, solve problems and support projects and it is this unique mix of points of view and experience which has helped the partnership to establish its legitimacy and stature.

The organisational structure of BGCP has evolved as it has grown. It began as a loose network hosted by Bristol City Council with an elected voluntary chairperson and vice chair.

The council funded the position of Green Capital Coordinator/Manager but the intention was always that it would have an independent leadership, identity and remit.



BGCP launch event, March 2007

Growth phase (2010)

The network could not function without meaningful engagement from its members. To ensure appropriate time was invested in growing it, the council's coordinator created a Momentum Group to allow the most engaged members to effectively act as an informal decision making body. A chair and vice-chair were elected by the members. The Momentum Group was loose, informal and agile, but not representative or democratic; ideally suited for the partnership's early days.

In 2010, the council provided additional funding for a small grants programme, the Community Challenge Fund, which was distributed by the BGCP. The decision-making for the awarding of the small grants was made by a broadly representative panel of volunteers from the Partnership's Momentum Group.

Ambition phase (2010 – 2014)

As the Momentum Group grew, its role shifted to information exchange, networking and progressing ideas from idea stage to nascent projects. Once the BGCP reached a certain size, it became necessary to have a more formal governance process to ensure that all members felt their views were being represented and heard. In response, a small Steering Group was created and different members were invited to bring skills and perspectives to the initiative, advising on decision making and providing governance for the manager.

Work began on the second bid for European Green Capital in 2011, and the BGCP became the locus for organisations who wished to contribute to this process. In 2013, when Bristol was awarded the designation, the number of people wanting to be actively involved in planning for 2015 grew from about 50 to over 200, so Action Groups were created to drive change in different areas. Sixteen groups were established (and most remain active today) on core issues such as transport, waste and nature as well as cross-cutting themes like evaluation, communication, engagement and education.

Legacy body (2014 onwards)

The BGCP played a key role in Bristol's bid for the European Green Capital designation but the partnership preceded and will outlive the programmes and structures associated with 2015.

On 29 May 2014, it was registered as an independent Community Interest Company (CIC) meaning that it is now a formally governed social enterprise. The day to day activities of the Bristol Green Capital Partnership CIC are maintained by a small staff team, governed by a Board of CIC Directors made up of unpaid independent and elected representatives.

The council has provided funding for an Executive Director to explore how to run the BGCP as an independent legacy organisation for the city, able to capitalise on the momentum built up this year. From 2016 onwards, it will no longer be supported by Bristol City Council and new funding models will be required to provide salaries for the central team.

The Action Groups continue to be hosted by elected individuals from member organisations, and together form an Advisory Group for the partnership, representing the wider partnership membership.

First Meeting of the Momentum Group 2007



How is the Bristol Green Capital Partnership funded?

Although the members contribute a great deal to the functioning of the BGCP, there is still a very real need for a funded core team.

For most of the Partnership's life (6-7 out of 9 years) the council funded the position of Green Capital Coordinator / Manager plus administrative support within its Sustainable City Team, and supplied a small capital budget to cover things like venue hire, printed materials, websites design and maintenance and CRM software.

The council also provided additional funding for a small grants programme, the Community Challenge Fund, with a budget of £75,000 each year for two years plus administrative support (although the policies and procedures of the fund were heavily based on a previous grants programme so very little resource was required).

However, the partnership is a network organisation and has therefore been extensively supported through value in kind. Whilst the scale and monetary value of this support has never been formally calculated, it would be considerable. Contributions have come from the commercial, public and third sector in many forms including: helping to start new projects or develop existing ones; sitting on funding panels; contributing to Action Groups; governing the partnership; and representing the BGCP on other panels around the city. We estimate that, to date, members have freely given at least 5,000 hours of their time.

Indeed, at the outset, the partnership put on as few events as possible in order to conserve resources, but found a number of partners willing to co-brand events for mutual benefit. They benefitted from an association with the BGCP brand, as well as getting access to a large contacts database. In this way, for three to four years, despite almost no budget beyond staff costs, a lively calendar of events was published in the BGCP's well-read newsletter.

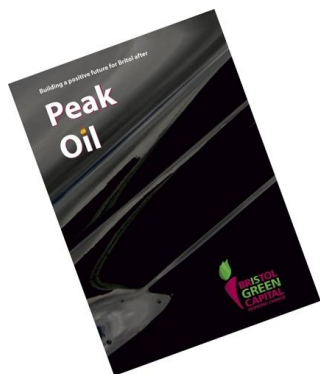
Looking ahead, once the council's funding ceases at the end of 2015, the team at the helm of the newly created Community Interest Company will explore new models to generate revenue. This is essential in order to fund a central team to administer and lead the partnership. Decisions have not yet been made as to how this may be done but could include charging a membership fee or delivering a number of paid-for services.

What has the Bristol Green Capital Partnership achieved?

Here are some examples of the contribution that the BGCP has made in delivering the ambition to create a low carbon city with a high quality of life:

- **Dispersing the Community Challenge Fund**

Bristol City Council made £150,000 available for the BGCP to give to local communities to help create sustainable change, along with additional funds needed to run a grants programme. The fund has supported over 40 projects in the city including Sims Hill Shared Harvest, the Somali Resource Centre and the Bristol Energy Network. The BGCP added a considerable amount of value to the financial support since projects gained support in other forms, such as expert time given on a pro bono basis.



- **Thought-leadership**

The BGCP supported the development of the *Peak Oil* report (2009) and *Who Feeds Bristol? A Resilient Food Plan for Bristol* (2011) as well as developing the *Future City Conversations* report in 2012.

- **Building strong networks**

Networking, both formal and informal, has helped initiate and grow numerous projects, as well as simply allowing people to share ideas and solve problems. This ranges from structured networking to workshops to drinks - since mid-2010, BGCP members have met each month for networking drinks; initially around 30 people attended and now as many as 80 turn up each month, proof that informal networking is considered worthwhile.

- **Championing grassroots projects**

The partnership has catalysed numerous highly successful new projects, with its involvement increasing their odds of success as well as their reach, impact and longevity. The fact that the BGCP does not actually “own” these projects is viewed as another success factor. The Bristol Pound, Prepare for Change, Bristol Green Doors, Community Farm and many more have found invaluable support – financial and otherwise – from the partnership.

- **Supporting the bid for European Green Capital**

The partnership was a key player in the bids for 2014 & 2015; while the council produced the technical bid, getting the city ranked first for 2015, shortlisted cities then have to convince the jury of the potential to engage citizens and communicate to the city and the rest of Europe. Numerous partnership members contributed to the package put together and helped to present the winning bid in Brussels. These included Knowle West Media Centre (kwmc.org.uk), and Easton & Lawrence Hill Neighbourhood Management (eastonandlawrencehill.org.uk).

- **Education and engagement**

This stream of the BGCP’s work has included helping to set up Big Green Week, creating a series of educational films, which have been viewed more than 15,000 times on YouTube; the UK’s first Peak Oil business conference; and creating and curating the Green Zone at the Bristol Harbour Festival, a major city centre event attended by 250,000 people.

Advice on how to set up a partnership

Below, the people involved in establishing and running the BGCP share their tips for creating a successful partnership:

GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE

- **Find the best Chair you can:** The BGCP has benefitted from 3 charismatic chairs, each quite different but all respected for their high levels of competence and integrity and breadth of experience.
- **Get funding for the core team:** The BGCP has relied on voluntary action – and been a success because of it – but to ensure the organisation has the capacity to act quickly and efficiently, and to provide a level of service to its members - indeed to unlock all those thousands of voluntary hours, funding for a core team of people is essential.
- **Ensure the Municipality acts as enablers, not do-ers:** The role that the council funded to support the BGCP was unusual in that he/she was not responsible for delivery and, instead, worked hard to encourage the partner members to generate activity. It's not easy for the council to "let go" but it was critical to the success of the BGCP.
- **Balance transparency with speed:** A democratic, inclusive approach with good governance structures inevitably slows an organisation down. Different modes suit different stages; speed, responsiveness and a non-hierarchical approach are always important but even more so in a young partnership.

GALVANISE OTHERS

- **Do a lot with a little:** A partnership must be the work of its members, not its core staff. This is for two reasons: firstly, the partnership's core resource is unlikely ever to be big enough. Secondly, when members act like owners their commitment to the partnership grows and this helps to build capacity and protect the long term viability of the partnership.
- **Capture energy, be opportunistic:** during the growth phase of a partnership this is really

important. People will come and offer to do things, usually motivated by the change to showcase their skills and maximize the benefits of association, as well as for altruistic reasons. However, manage the risk that this can conflict with a strategic or steady sense of direction. The process of project selection can be unfair if those chosen are led by the most willing and proactive people, rather than the best.

BUILD YOUR PROFILE

- **Build credibility:** There is a fine line to tread when establishing credibility and independence. A partnership that is too outspoken and critical will find it hard to keep its funding and will also lose its credibility with evidence-focused organisations like the council, universities and many larger businesses. However, keep too quiet and the most dynamic and active members such as campaigners and start-ups will get frustrated and withdraw or, worse, turn against the partnership. In Bristol, the BGCP has been criticised by both sides, yet its ongoing success suggests the balance has been about right.
- **Act as thought leaders:** In turn, an independent partnership can speak for the people. It would have been difficult for a city council to publish reports like Peak Oil, whereas it can add support, backing and a logo to a partnership-published report.

STAY CONNECTED

- **Consult widely:** share plans and gather feedback but be careful not to allow too much to be done by committee where the dynamism of a project can be blunted.
- **Don't Duplicate:** Listen and ensure the partnership is in touch with what is already happening in the city. Be aware that it is easy to get carried away with an exciting opportunity and embark on a new project when others in the city are already working on it.

BEHAVE LIKE PROS

- **Apply classic, best practice management:** It might sound simple but be clear about your objectives, in specific terms: split your overall aim into genuinely SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and targeted); be careful how you allocate roles and responsibilities, and keep a clear record of who is supposed to be doing what; and ensure that people are doing what they say they will do in between meetings – it is more important than what happens at the meetings!
- **Presentation is key:** The BGCP has benefited from clear, high quality communications written in business-orientated language. This helped to inspire confidence and spread information virally and peer-to-peer, ensuring the partnership grew rapidly. We knew that businesses would be reluctant to join a

partnership that felt too grassroots or community-led whereas adopting a business-like and professional tone did not discourage third sector and community organisations from joining.

- **Run meetings well:** We give lots of notice of our regular quarterly meetings and ensure that they cover a variety of highly relevant issues. These meetings are held in carefully chosen venues and are firmly chaired while ensuring there is plenty of opportunity for participation.
- **Create an accountable governance structure:** the way in which the BGCP is run needs to be independent and inclusive, able to challenge its stakeholders while also inviting collaboration. Getting the balance right has been an ongoing effort, particularly as the partnership has grown and evolved.



Different perspectives

“Bristol has long been known for its creativity and energy, manifest in the many community projects that have been among the city’s most attractive features. Indeed, the city would be far less richly endowed with interest had the community not fought to protect its finest houses, streets and spaces. Demolition, road-building and short-term development interests have threatened Bristol as much as any city. The cranes and ferries on the much-loved docks, much of the harbourside itself, hundreds of our finest buildings would simply not be here without community intervention. So it was a wise Council that gathered together many of these groups to form the Green Capital Partnership a few years ago, to push and prod the city to improve its environmental performance. In so doing, who knows, we might even win the European Green Capital award.

“Well, at the third attempt, we did win it - a magnificent stimulus to further green thinking and endeavour. The Partnership now has nearly 700 members, most of them companies or organisations, all pledged to make this a greener city. It is a rare and unusual grouping, and marks the beginning of a long and vitally important journey. Not only does it act as a dynamic network for ideas and initiatives, but it can be a ‘critical friend’ to the Council. It is fitting that the Partnership should come to be seen as the main ‘legacy’ organisation for 2016 and beyond, working to bring together all the thousands of efforts being made to make this a genuinely green city. For no local government can achieve these things alone. It is the combined efforts of the hundreds of community groups that will change this city, along with strategic thinking and policy changes.”

Alastair Sawday, former chair of BGCP



“By being neither a private enterprise nor a public sector body, the BGCP is a neutral space.”

“This is a huge strength: although supported by Bristol City Council, the partnership has a reputation as an independent body that is in no way dictated to or dominated by the municipality. Nor is it tailored to just one sector: businesses and the voluntary sector have found value and common ground in the BGCP. This, in turn, has given local politicians a mandate to push harder on green issues than they might otherwise have done.

“A different kind of organisation would have been torn apart, or gradually disintegrated by the tensions and differences within the partnership. Grassroots projects and collectives of activists rarely sit down with senior leadership of multinational business services corporations. Yet this mix is precisely the strength of the BGCP and gives it the legitimacy that enables the council to support it.”

Mark Leach, Bristol City Council



What other partnerships are there in Bristol?

The Bristol Green Capital Partnership has always recognised that it is one of many networks in the city and seeks to interact with them in a positive, collaborative and interactive way. Indeed, many of these other organisations are members.

Below are brief outlines of other notable partnerships in the Bristol region that are focussed on particular aspects of the green agenda. This is not intended as a comprehensive list. Please visit their websites to learn more.

Bristol Energy Network

Launched in 2010, the Bristol Energy Network is an umbrella organisation for all community energy groups in Bristol and the surrounding area. It aims to promote community solutions for sustainable energy provision and use by facilitating and promoting the diverse activities and projects undertaken by its community energy group members. It does this by: cascading news, information and policy updates from local partners and national organisations; acting as a conduit between local groups and external organisations; and providing an open platform for the sharing of resources, ideas and debate through regular open meetings. The network is strongly action-orientated and seeks to promote collaboration between existing and new groups for the benefit of all.

Since the network's inception in 2010 it has, amongst other things, been a springboard for the formation of Bristol Green Doors, the launching of the Bristol Energy Co-operative's share offer, the promotion of Demand Energy Equality's Solar Tree, a platform for the sharing of knowledge gained through nine successful Bristol-based Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) grants at the beginning of 2012 and the creation of a Bristol Community Strategy for Energy.

www.bristolenergynetwork.org

Transition Bristol

Transition Bristol is a not-for-profit company working to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and to promote sustainability. It is a volunteer-led initiative that acts as a support and enabler for city-level resilience projects in the area. The core team want to see Bristol transition from an energy dependent system to a locally resilient, sustainable, productive and vibrant city.

transitionbristol.net

Bristol Food Network CIC

The Bristol Food Network is a Community Interest Company that supports, informs and connects individuals, community projects, organisations and businesses who share a vision to transform Bristol into a sustainable food city.

Its objectives – drawn from the report 'A Good Food Plan for Bristol' – are to build a food culture that has the health of people and planet at its heart. This includes: championing independent food shops and co-ops; encouraging people to cook, grow and eat local, seasonal food; and promoting the use of good quality land in and around Bristol for food production.

www.bristolfoodnetwork.org

Bristol Solar City

Bristol Solar City is a group of local organisations that are aiming to make Bristol the UK's solar capital. Its partners include education and research institutions, community energy groups, cooperatives, installers and wholesalers of renewable technologies.

The ambition is to install 1GW of solar PV by 2020 which would far exceed the electricity requirements of all the homes in Bristol, and provide energy security and economic stability as a city.

www.bristolsolarcity.com

BRISTOL 2015

European Green Capital is a prestigious annual award designed to promote and reward the efforts of cities to improve the environment. Bristol is the first ever UK city to win the award.

European Green Capital is run by The European Commission, recognising that Europe's urban societies face many environmental challenges – and that sustainable, low-carbon living is vital to the future of our cities and our people.

The award was first won by Stockholm in 2010. Since then, Hamburg, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Nantes and Copenhagen have carried the torch. Bristol will hand over to Ljubljana at the end of the year.

THE BRISTOL METHOD

The Bristol Method is a knowledge-transfer programme aimed at helping people in other cities understand and apply the lessons that Bristol has learned in becoming a more sustainable city, not just in 2015 but in the last decade.

Each module of the Bristol Method is presented as an easy-to-digest 'how to' guide on a particular topic, which use Bristol's experiences as a case study. The modules contain generic advice and recommendations that each reader can tailor to their own circumstances.

The Bristol Method modules are published on the Bristol 2015 website at www.bristol2015.co.uk/method

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