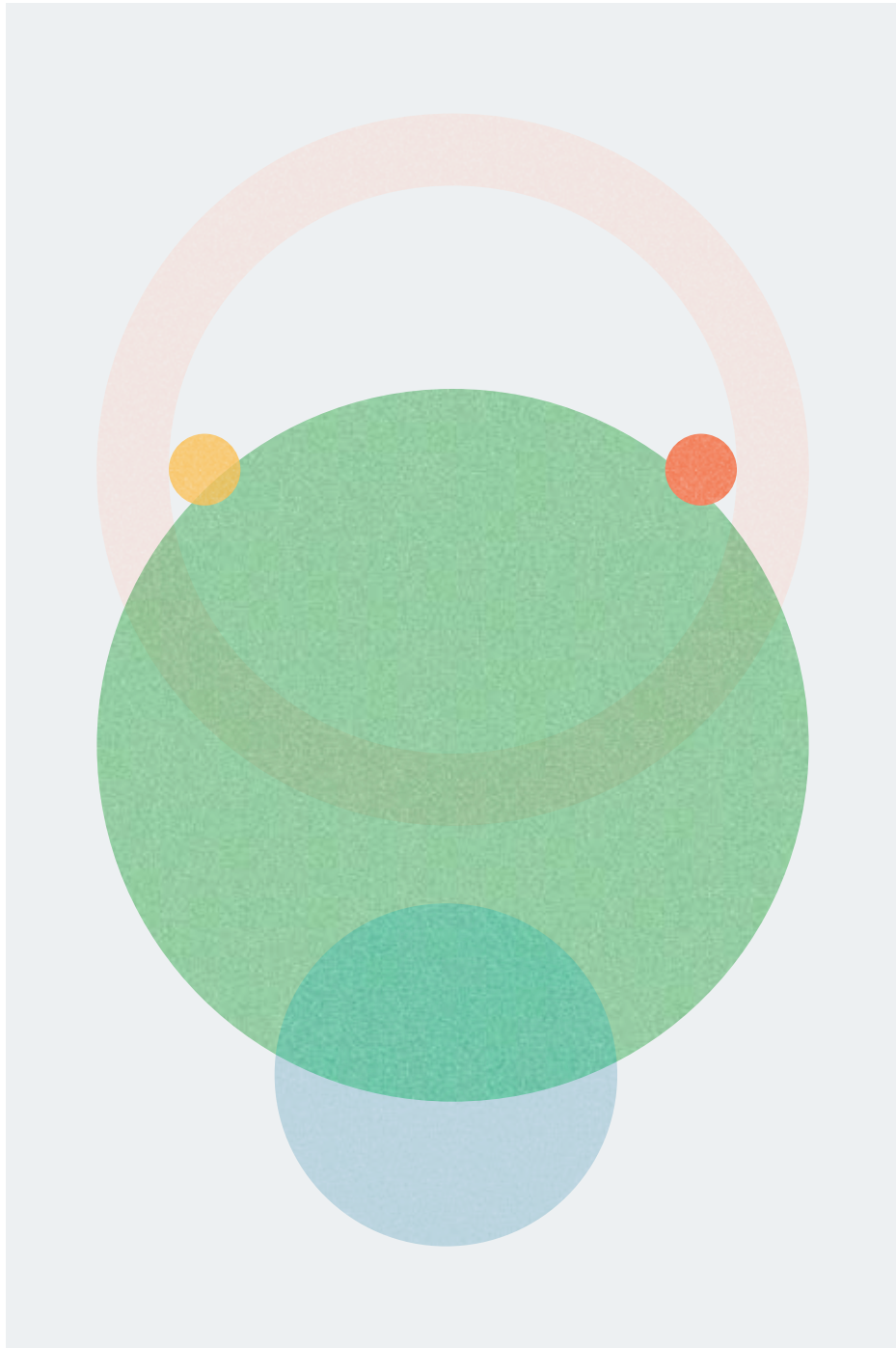


# Community Spaces in Kensington & Chelsea

Challenges  
& Opportunities





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# Community Spaces in Kensington & Chelsea

## Challenges & Opportunities

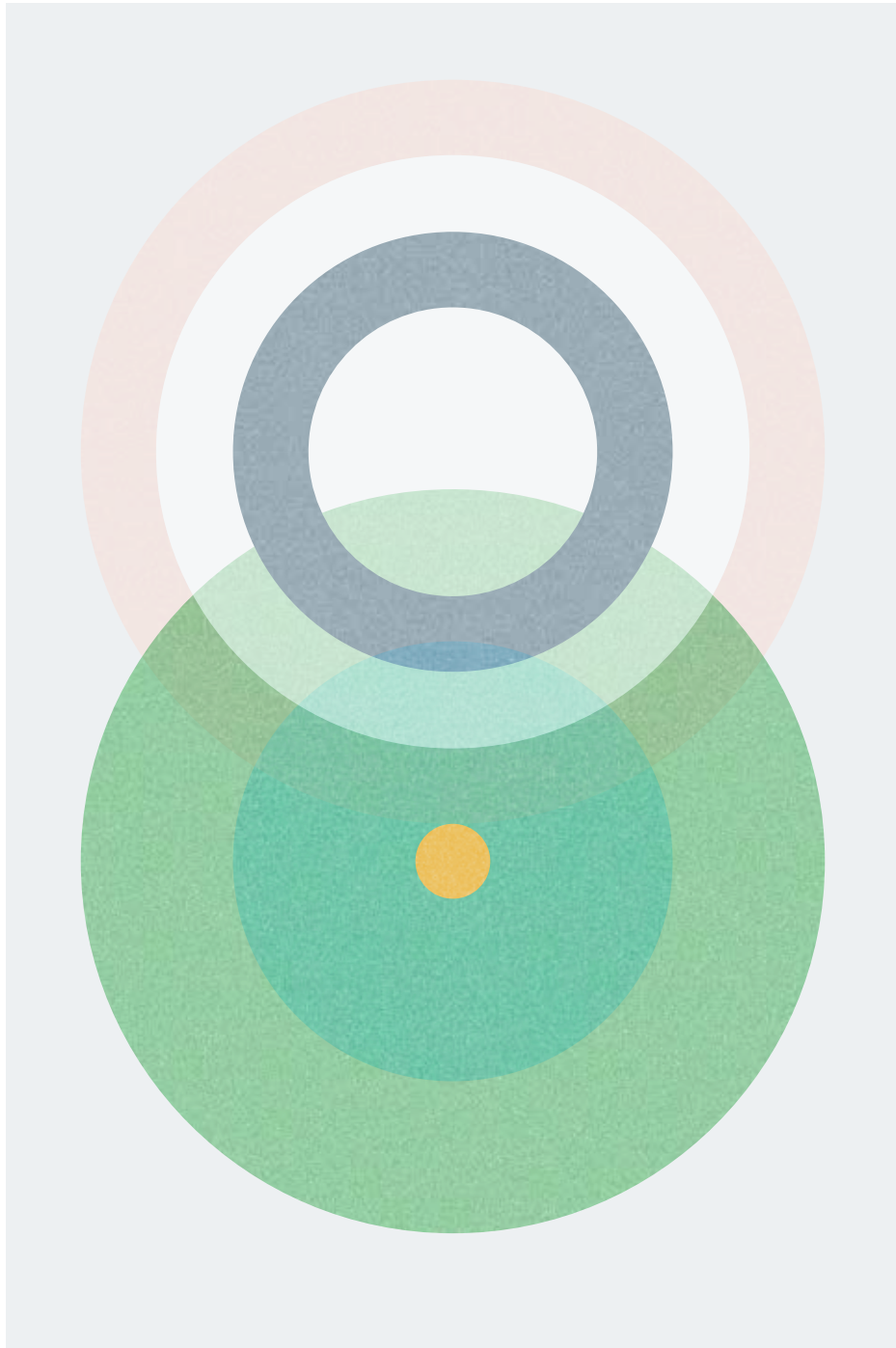
In April 2025, The Lightbulb Trust commissioned exploratory research to assess the landscape of physical spaces for the voluntary sector within the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (K&C). This report shares the learning from that research. Its findings point to information, access, and trust-building as being key areas for improvement and intervention.

With research partner:

**Archipel  
&Co.**



Hornimans  
Adventure  
Playground



# Introduction

We are a place-based funder with a focus on West London. Our work is grounded in long-term relationships, deep listening, and the belief that proximity leads to better decisions. We believe in local interventions because all year round we see the difference they make: a trusted adult in a school, a warm meal at a community hub, a creative outlet at a youth club. Such initiatives bring stability and hope amid challenging times.

A secure physical space is fundamental to these interventions: a reliable location where people can come together, empowering themselves and their community.

The reality, however, is that the home out of which a charity operates (with its all-too-often precarious attendant issues) is seldom discussed.

That is why we are scrutinising physical spaces in this report. We believe that 'place' should be more prominently addressed as a key constituent part of any charitable work within any community – starting here, with our own.

**Salome & Ben Holden**

Co-Founders

The Lightbulb Trust



# Objectives

The Lightbulb Trust commissioned this research to understand how physical spaces could better serve our charitable partners in K&C. The research engaged community

partners to understand not only whether space is lacking, but how current infrastructure functions and where barriers exist. Specifically, it aimed to:

**a.** Understand current local provisions around physical space

**b.** Identify key constraints for partner organisations

**c.** Map community needs for venues and services

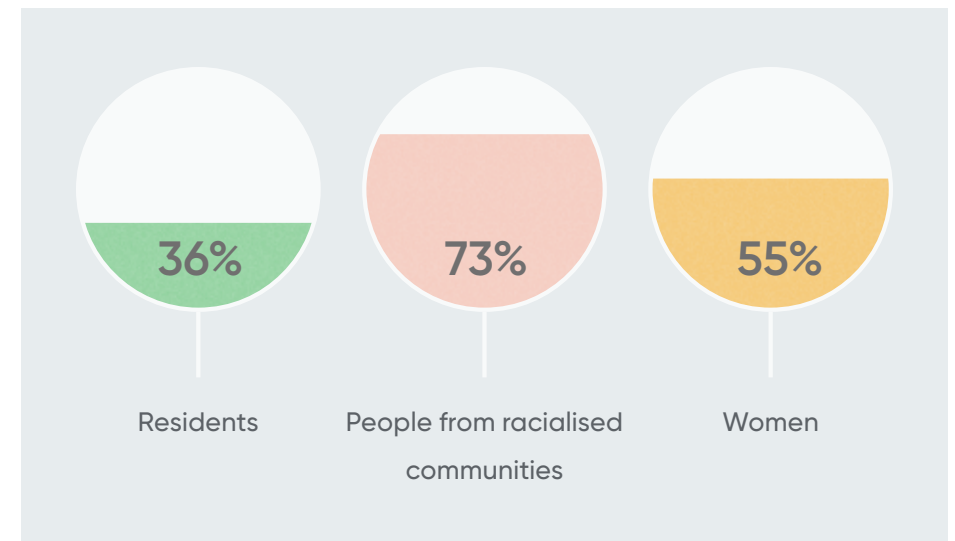
**d.** Explore spatial models such as community hubs and booking systems



# Methodology

We engaged Archipel&Co who conducted a qualitative, mixed-method study combining desk research, on-site interviews, and thematic analysis. Twelve interviews were conducted with

K&C community leaders and Lightbulb Trust partners, including residents (36%), people from racialised communities (73%), and women (55%), offering diverse lived experiences and perspectives.





Young K&C

# Key Findings

Two interlinked themes shape the voluntary sector's access to space in K&C: **Access & Infrastructure** and **Trust & Power**. Access and infrastructure represent the 'hard' conditions – logistical, financial, and structural – while trust and power constitute the 'soft' dimensions – relational, cultural, and political.

# 3.1

## Access & Infrastructure

Unpacking the tangible barriers social purpose organisations face when seeking and maintaining premises.

### Affordability & Lease Security

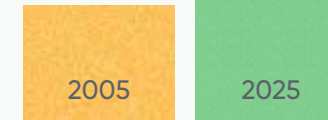
Costs have risen sharply: venue hire has more than doubled in 20 years, and rents of £30–£40 per sq ft are common. Even “community rates” (~£20) are rare. Many smaller charities are priced out or left with short 3–5-year leases that hinder long-term planning. The prevalence of both informal agreements and complex documentation, which reduces the understanding and accessibility of contracts, further limits access. At the time of the research,

K&C council was reviewing and updating its lease arrangements to make them more straightforward and permanent, aiming to complete the process by the end of 2025.

### Maintenance & Hidden Costs

Aging buildings bring high utility and repair costs. Problems such as structural damage or asbestos can suddenly make a site unusable. Hidden costs for staffing, cleaning, and maintenance add further financial strain.

Venue hire has more than doubled in 20 years.



Standard rents for office space sit at £30 to £40 per square foot, with “community rates” (~£20 per square foot) becoming rare.

Recreational facilities, such as small football fields, now cost up to £50 per hour.



### Essential Needs

Lack of storage, accessibility issues, and safeguarding requirements make space-sharing difficult, especially for youth organisations. Private ownership of most green space (estimated 80–90%) limits outdoor activities and highlights inequalities between north and south K&C.

### Visibility & Utilisation

Finding appropriate space is challenging. Many suitable sites – places of worship, unused shops, or businesses offering occasional use – may be underutilised. The absence of a single comprehensive

venue directory forces reliance on informal networks. K&C Council created an online directory during COVID for organisations to list spaces for hire and generate income. However, it has seen limited use, with few listings and mainly one-off event spaces rather than recurring rentals.

An initial spreadsheet and map of K&C community spaces created for the research showed strong potential to increase awareness and coordination. If kept updated and used regularly, this could be a useful tool.

# 3.2

## Trust & Power

Physical space goes beyond bricks & mortar – it is also a reflection of power, relationships, and conflicting perspectives.

### **Shared Culture & Collaboration**

Strong, long-standing, trust-based relationships enable the most flexible sharing of facilities. Leadership values and local roots play a major role in fostering this trust, though data is too limited to show definite trends.

### **Competition & Gatekeeping**

Rising costs and limited availability have increased competition for space. Some organisations “guard” access to venues they’ve worked hard to secure – not out of exclusion, but as a survival tactic in a scarce environment.



### **Bureaucracy & Council Relations**

Compliance requirements, ranging from energy-performance certificates to safeguarding policies, create administrative burdens. Perceptions of the Council are divided: approximately 70% of interviewees expressed frustration with bureaucracy, while 30% reported constructive relationships, typically among long-established, locally-rooted groups.

### **Conflicting Mental Models**

Underlying these tensions are substantially divergent perceptions of need. Interviewees offered varying views on how need is distributed across the north and the south of the borough. Moreover, smaller charities adopt a pragmatic “make-do” mentality whilst larger “super-connector” organisations often push for systemic, change sometimes, leading to greater frustration when collaborating with the Council.

# 4



London Sports Trust

# Areas for Exploration

The research suggests that the main opportunity lies in improving visibility, access, and coordination across existing (and any future) spaces.

## **4.1 A searchable database & map**

A centralised map and database could significantly improve awareness and collaboration. This could begin as an information-sharing tool, with potential to grow in functionality over time depending on demand.

## **4.2 Practical tools & legal support**

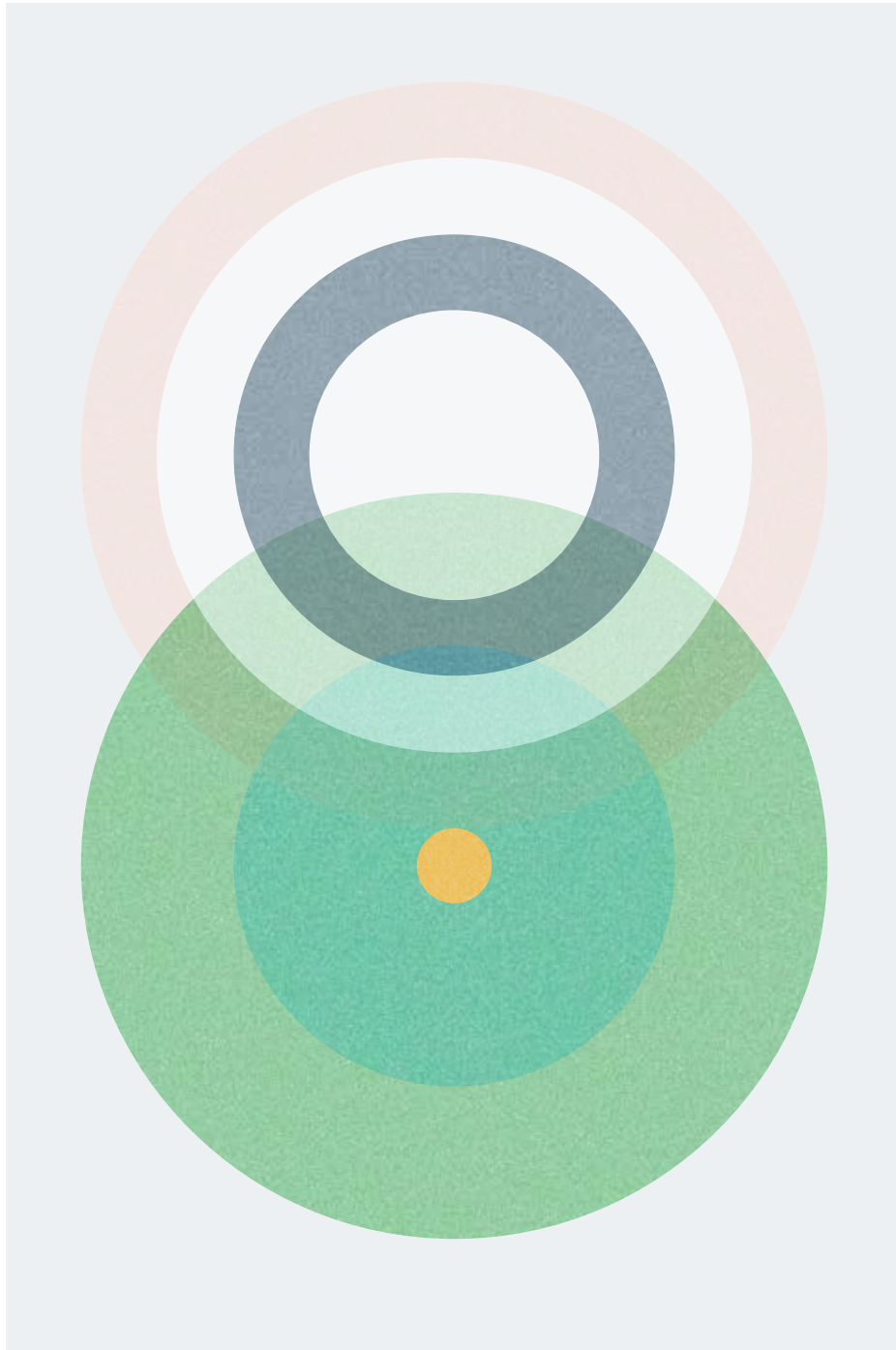
Clearer guidance on space-sharing and access to pro bono legal advice could help small organisations navigate leases, safeguarding, and compliance.

## **4.3 Funding strategy**

Findings highlighted spatial inequalities, with smaller organisations facing greater barriers to accessing suitable space. Funders could use these insights to target support – recognising true costs and identifying geographic areas with limited provision.

## **4.4 Insights for wider collaboration**

This research may be useful in borough-wide and cross-borough conversations. Sharing this report's insights with infrastructure organisations, local authorities, and other funders could help build better coordinated approaches to community space.



### About the Lightbulb Trust

The Lightbulb Trust empowers people to change their lives for the better. Through a combination of grantmaking and impact investing, Lightbulb supports initiatives that enfranchise society's less advantaged. We seek to bridge divides and make a difference: specifically, in the fields of literacy and learning, social and emotional wellbeing, arts and creativity, and social infrastructure.

Founded in West London, our drive is to improve the lives of others, both locally and farther afield. We offer funding and support to organisations with a strong social drive. These include grassroots community initiatives – local heroes helping their areas thrive – as well as more systemic, disruptive changers who have had bold 'lightbulb moments', big ideas that challenge the way things traditionally get done.

We believe in the power of relationships and collaboration, that our 'whole' can be more than the sum of our 'parts'. Lightbulb's flexibility and partner-centric ethos as a funder – alongside our range of pro bono offerings – means that we provide more than just financial support.

This network of partnerships offers a safety net, enhancing the life-chances of thousands of marginalised people. From infancy to adulthood, the Lightbulb Trust is inspired by the power of learning in all its various guises.

[lightbulbtrust.org](http://lightbulbtrust.org)



### About Archipel & Co

Archipel&Co is a social innovation and impact strategy partner. We support and accelerate business and social-sector leaders to understand and deliver on their impact potential.

[archipel-co.com](http://archipel-co.com)