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CAT case study

Jacob's Wells Baths, Bristol BS8

[JWB website](#)

The challenge

Large building with a 1,600m² footprint, arranged over several levels, with a very tall chimney at the rear. Opened in 1889 as a municipal baths and swimming pool complex. The original pool, boiler house and water storage tanks remain intact. The building is Grade II listed and also listed as an Asset of Community Value. Closed in 1977 and converted into a community dance centre. The tenant handed the property back in 2016. The overall condition of the property is very poor, especially the glazed, lantern roof. The building has fallen into major disrepair due to water ingress and a lack of investment in repairs & maintenance over more than 10 years.

The CAT process used

Expressions of interest were invited in 2016, and four bids were received. An ambitious proposal by a national leisure operator to restore the pool and create a leisure, dance and community facility was chosen and approved by Cabinet. Its scheme was delayed by the pandemic, suffered large cost increases, and faced huge energy bills. In the end, it was unable to line up the necessary capital and handed the property back in 2022. A new CAT process in March 2023 resulted in two bidders, of which Trinity Community Arts was chosen. TCA moved at pace, took over responsibility for the property in July, and commenced an emergency repair programme. It has been very successful in attracting grant funding and raised £1.5M in just 6 months. It currently expects to open in early 2026.

The outcomes

TCA was awarded £1M from the Community Ownership Fund to save the building for future generations. A new 35-year CAT lease will help create a new dance, arts, culture, youth and community facility in central Bristol. The project benefits from TCA's vast expertise in restoring the Trinity Centre and turning it around. The CAT also produces significant annual revenue savings for the Council, at no cost to Bristol.

Lessons learned

- the asset had become a liability and was virtually worthless at the time the CAT was approved
- the project would not have taken off if we had not worked with such an experienced partner organisation
- transferring a liability to a VCSE organisation should only be undertaken after sources of potential capital funding have been identified and after all other options have been ruled out