

## Measuring Social and Cultural Infrastructure – Guidance for the Private Sector

Social and cultural infrastructure plays a critical, yet often unnoticed, role in the lives of communities. Despite the concept(s) gaining traction in policy and research circles in recent years, until now there has been no consistent approach to measuring it. Funded by the British Academy, this project develops a novel approach to the measurement of social and cultural infrastructure.

This guidance outlines the framework and why it is useful for the private sector. It also provides a theoretical example of how an asset owner could use the framework, though we encourage all users to use the framework in a way that is tailored to their priorities and context.

### ***Why is the framework useful for the private sector?***

The private sector, particularly developers, asset owners, and investors, plays an **increasingly significant role** in creating and supporting social and cultural infrastructure.

While private sector involvement in social and cultural infrastructure is often the result of planning obligations, such as Section 106 agreements or ESG objectives, many businesses are **increasingly recognising the strong business case** behind it.

- These assets attract footfall, enhance employees' wellbeing and productivity, and improve the viability of developments.

Regardless of their incentives, our framework enables private sector actors to better understand the needs of communities by providing them with a structured approach to **identifying opportunities, evaluating impact, and aligning investment decisions with financial and social goals.**

### ***Key points of the framework***

#### **Social and cultural infrastructure *is* infrastructure.**

We propose a characteristics-based approach grounded in the theory and language of infrastructure. This approach involves asking three key questions:

- Is the entity being measured an asset?
- Does it function as infrastructure?
- Is it social and cultural in character?

#### **Measurement is a process.**

We have developed a unique measurement framework, which involves three phases:

- Phase 1 involves asking why we are measuring and what we will do with the results.
- Phase 2 moves to identifying and measuring the 'stock' of social and cultural infrastructure and its usage.
- Phase 3 encourages stakeholders to present and analyse the evidence collected in dynamic and creative ways that facilitate action.

### ***Strengths of the framework***

We believe our approach possesses a number of strengths:

1. It encourages stakeholders to think about how social and cultural assets **interact with other types of infrastructure.**
2. It ensures **greater transparency** with regards to the measurement process and decisions taken as a consequence.
3. It is **flexible** in that it enables anyone to use it, regardless of their purpose, and allows its users to determine the assets under consideration.
4. It encourages a **wide range of data and views** to be taken into account, from national perspectives to community voices.

## Case Study: Private Asset Owner

### 1. Who is measuring and why?

A private asset owner owns a large shopping centre, which has faced declining footfall and rising vacancy rates in recent years. The asset owner wants to understand how it can **reverse these trends, improve commercial returns, and generate social impact** by using the shopping centre to provide social and cultural infrastructure.

### 2.a Identifying social and cultural infrastructure

To understand how the shopping centre does and can provide social and cultural infrastructure, the asset owner **takes a broad view, incorporating any assets (whether physical or intangible) in the shopping centre and surrounding area** with the appropriate characteristics into the measurement process.

### 2.b Measuring provision

The asset owner examines **its own data on what social and cultural infrastructure** already exists in the shopping centre.

It also sends a team out **to walk adjacent streets to understand what social and cultural provision** there is nearby and its relationship to the shopping centre.

It then categorises the assets to explore the types of provision in the area.

### 2.c Measuring use and access

The asset owner uses one of the vacant units as a **drop-in space for passers-by to come in and discuss what spaces and networks they use** in the area, what they need, and what they want. They also **run several workshops** in the unit facilitated by a local charity to enable more-in depth exploration.

The asset owner **sets up a working group** with local charities and community organisations, schools, the local council, and the local NHS board, to **enable ongoing communication with key stakeholders** and **identify critical local needs** that the shopping centre could help to tackle.

### 3. Analysis and decision-making

The asset owner **presents the evidence collected to the working group** to discuss what changes should be made.

It then decides to:

- Work with the council and the NHS to turn a large empty unit into a **publicly-run wellbeing hub**, which provides support and services e.g. sexual health services and homelessness support.
- Turn another empty unit into a **creative space for the local youth groups** to use for art exhibitions, theatre productions, and music performances.
- Work with local businesses to **set up a monthly market** in the shopping centre.
- **Install extra lighting** around the shopping centre to improve security in the evening.

After one year, the asset owner **undertakes the measurement process again** to understand the social and economic impact of the improved provision of social and cultural infrastructure.