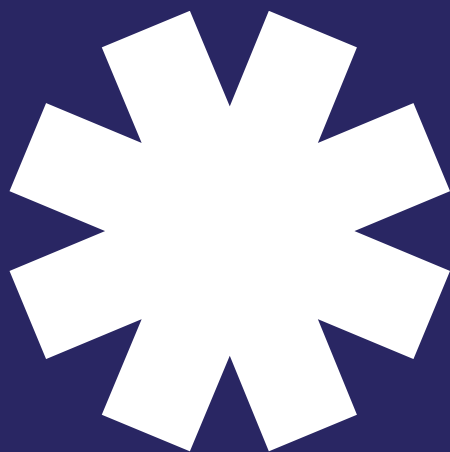




ANNUAL REPORT 2025





Joycelyn Longdon at Festival of Debate 2025

Photo credit: [Adva Photography](#)



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Festival of Debate 2025
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Dickinson

INTRODUCTION



Opus works to create and support responses to achieve urgent systemic change. We do this by telling stories, bringing people together and demonstrating ‘proofs of possibility’.

Once again it’s been a year of great change at Opus. We’ve welcomed more colleagues into the fold, expanded our work and our thinking in many directions, moved into a new office, and laid a financial foundation for the next two to three years (more detail on all of this later in this report).

The work we do here at Opus asks a lot of us every day. It requires sitting with harm and injustice and trying to stay energised rather than paralysed by the immensity of the challenges we face. In this context, holding each other with care – clearing the space that each of us needs to *grow up and show up well*, together and with intention – will always be a work in progress. There is no map and we will

take wrong turns, but our collective compass is becoming more attuned. Thank you to everyone working at Opus for the commitment you’ve shown over the past 12 months: how much you have given is clear in the work and it’s really appreciated.

We’re proud of the work we’ve done in 2025, in collaboration with so many valued partners across the city, region, country and the globe. From being a major contributor to the Sheffield City Goals blueprint design work to hosting a hugely successful ten-year anniversary Festival of Debate, as well as countless things in between, there’s not been a single dull day. And despite the many challenges we face, as a city and a species,

there's a clear sense of emergent possibility both in Sheffield and South Yorkshire that wasn't present just a few years ago.

At the same time, it's difficult to celebrate in a year when things have felt like they're constantly unravelling – politically, socially, culturally and

Kate Raworth at Festival of Debate 2025

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economically. This manifests in many ways, from the erosion of our democracy and the worrying rise of the far-right (in the US and on our doorstep) to ongoing climate collapse, material scarcity and the cost-of-inequality crisis. These cascading crises are drowning out our ability to act towards transitions and our window to meaningfully address them is narrowing. We think, at least in the short term, this is only likely to get worse.

We therefore see one of our roles as boosting understanding of the urgency of transitions – of the fact that the biggest and most important issues of our time are too interdependent to be addressed in siloes, that many of our institutions are outdated and simply not up to the task, and that, in the face of collapse, the way we look at risk needs to change dramatically.

Across 2025, Opus's work has continued to range widely in form while becoming more coherent in intent. Our projects have engaged with poverty, value and income security through long-running work like the UBI Lab Network; with storying, sense-making and witnessing through platforms like Now Then, People's Newsroom, Festival of Debate and Opus Productions, our film and audio team; with ecological commitment infrastructures through the River Dôn Project and wider bioregional inquiry; and with the civic and institutional conditions required to act at neighbourhood, city and bioregional scales through the Sheffield City Goals and related collaboration infrastructures.

We have been deliberately developing shared capabilities in generative storytelling, publishing and distribution; in convening, facilitation and learning design; in systems mapping and sense-making; and, increasingly, in the design of new financing and investment architectures for transition. Taken together, this reflects a shift from seeing our work at Opus as a collection of initiatives toward holding it as an evolving set of capabilities and infrastructures that can support others to act in collaboration.

We continue to take inspiration from the work of like-minded groups the world over, most notably the systems change work of organisations like Dark Matter Labs, Regen Melbourne, and, closer to home, Birmingham's CIVIC SQUARE. We're starting to find some organisational community with others doing similar work, and it's leading to some really productive cross-pollination.

More broadly, our work is the result of our relationships with an eclectic mix of

fantastic people, groups and institutions, many of whom are here in Sheffield and South Yorkshire, and who continue to place their trust in our skills and in our mission. A heartfelt 'thank you' to everyone who has collaborated with and supported us in any way in 2025 – here's to more, and even better. The Opus of 2026 will look and feel different even to the Opus of 2025. In this moment – feeling both security and precarity, excitement and dejection, hope and despair – we're very much alive to the responsibilities and commitments we continue to hold in our work.

Having looked again at our mission and purpose together in late 2025, this coming year will see the folks at Opus working through the implications of that time spent together. We'll be re-affirming and re-focusing our intentions through different workflows and projects, and pointing them together towards our ultimate mission: a thriving future for all things on a liveable planet.

Opus Directors



2025 IN A NUTSHELL

January

The Now Then [Support Us](#) campaign goes live, with an accompanying video from Opus Productions

February

Laura Holmes joins the Opus team as Finance Coordinator

The UBI Lab Network launches their [Basic Income for Greater Manchester pilot proposal](#)

March

We announce our lineup for Festival of Debate 2025

We publish an article in [Now Then](#) naming some of the ethical tensions around our use of social media platforms at Opus, with the hope of 'learning out loud' and increasing transparency

The River Dôn Project works with Sheffield Hallam University to deliver an exhibition titled [fæthm: explorations in co-curation with the River Dôn](#)

April

Festival of Debate 2025 kicks off on 22 April, with [an event](#) supporting the Sheffield City Goals work

We welcomed headliners John Harris, Kate Raworth and Jason Hickel to Sheffield



Photo credit: [Adva Photography](#)

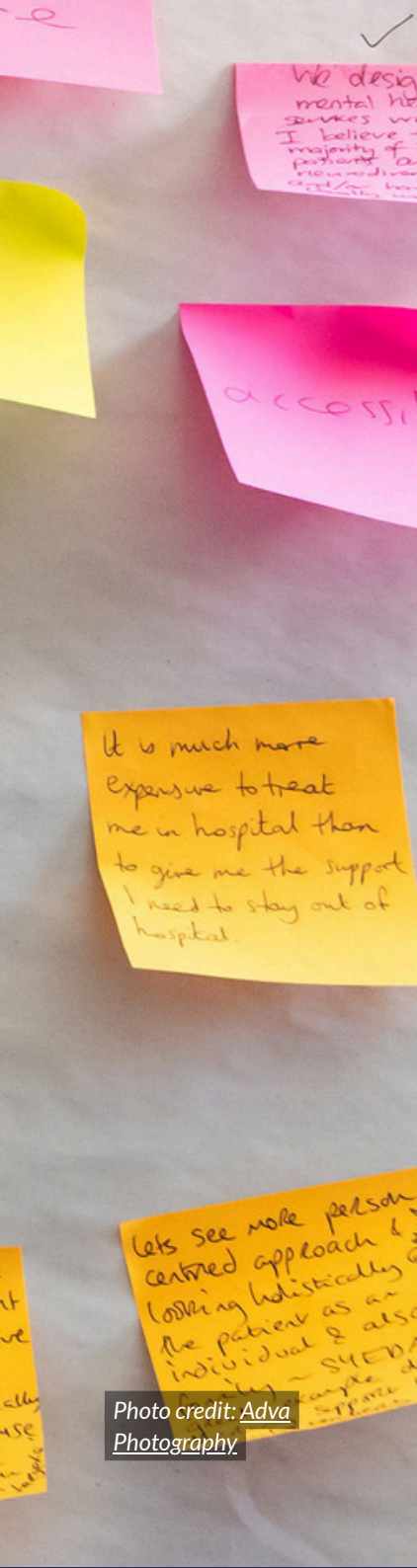


Photo credit: [Adva Photography](#)

The People's Newsroom Book Club launches, exploring *Hospicing Modernity* by Vanessa Machado de Oliveira

May

The Sheffield City Goals delivery team host a series of workshops designed to surface insight from people into the key inquiries of each workstream, with a view to designing a draft blueprint and implementation plan using the information gathered, as well as an initial set of Metrics that Matter

Festival of Debate continues with headliners Lanre Bakare, Shon Faye, Laura Bates, Jeremy Corbyn, Andy Burnham and Steve Rotheram, Nat Raha and Mijke van der Drift, Joycelyn Longdon and Kehinde Andrews

June

Bashkim Muca joins the Opus team as Sheffield Transition Finance Facility Coordinator

July

Now Then publishes a [collective editorial piece](#) expressing our desire to deepen connections with communities across the city, with an open invitation for individuals and organisations to get in touch

August

We move into our new office space at The Circle

September

Lucy Gavaghan joins the team as our Operations Manager

Efua Uiterwijk joins the team as our Workshop Designer and Facilitator

The Generative Journalism Alliance launches its own Substack, and begins publishing interviews centred around the concept of 'a Just Transition'

October

Wordlife hosts an in-conversation event with Keir Milburn and Debs Grayson, about *Radical Abundance*, followed by discussion groups hosted by Now Then

The final report for this phase of the City Goals work is submitted to Sheffield City Council

November

The team take part in a series of three Collective Learning sessions, exploring the local and national conditions we're operating within and responding to, and establishing core shared knowledge sets and understanding of key principles across the team

We announced in Now Then that we'll be taking a break from delivering the full Festival of Debate programme next year

December

The team participated in three R&D sessions centred around mission and purpose, which we hope will guide us as we enter 2026



Photo credit: Tim Feben



CORE UPDATES

2025 was a year of transition here at Opus, with the make-up of our team and the ways we work together changing significantly throughout.

In this section we'd like to share some of these headline updates, and introduce you to our newest members as well as our current Board of Directors.

CORE UPDATES FROM 2025



It's been a busy year here at Opus, with some significant changes to the make-up of the team and to our ways of working together. In this section we'll share some of the key updates from 2025 and introduce you to our newest team members. Here's a summary of some of our biggest updates:

We've continued to grow the Opus team throughout the year, with five new members joining. You can meet them all and find out a bit more about them overleaf.

In August we moved into our new office at The Circle. Since then, we've settled into our new space, and have been enjoying the benefits of working together in person.

In November, we held elections for the Opus Board of Directors, with a number

of new directors stepping into the role. You can find out more about our new directors later in this chapter.

In September, we worked with Rhiannon Davies of SenseMaker to develop the first in a series of questionnaires designed for Opus members, to help us better understand the inner workings of Opus as a collective.

In November we began a Collective Learning journey, in which we examined the context we're working in and undertook some shared learning about place-based theories of change.

In December, we closed out the year with a number of R&D sessions looking at Opus's collective values and operating principles. You can find out more about this in [this section](#).

NEW OPUS MEMBERS IN 2025

With Opus's work and reach ever increasing, it's been vital to continue recruiting new members to scale up our capacities and unlock new capabilities.

This year, we welcomed more new faces to the team than ever before, and every new member has brought their own experience, skills and perspectives to bear on our collective mission.

We've been so impressed with how they've embodied their new roles at Opus, and the fresh insight they've brought to the team. Find out more about each of them below:



LAURA HOLMES

Finance Coordinator

I joined Opus as Finance Co-ordinator in February 2025, after many years of interactions with the Opus team in different guises. I specialise in the hidden wiring, 'dark matter' or 'boring stuff' that organisations need to function, whether that be financials, processes or structures, and am keen to explore the breaks and cracks in the seemingly concrete bureaucratic landscape that organisations are expected to operate within, finding places where we can make space for life, for green shoots and new growth.

I've worked in organisations of different sizes and shapes, in the public, private and third sectors, most recently as Finance & HR Lead for MAIA and Executive Director for Third Angel. At other times, I've been a Creative Producer for large scale public events, a Business Manager for a national NHS team, co-founded arts co-operatives and curated events and festivals, been a childminder, bookkeeper, DJ, charity trustee and parent of three. I currently keep myself out of trouble by organising live music events under the name Buds & Spawn.



BASHKIM MUCA

Sheffield Transition Finance Facilitator

I'm a new addition to Opus, starting as the Sheffield Transition Finance Facilitator in June 2025. I get to pull from all the strands of my education in Accountancy, Business and International Business Law, as well as my work in the third sector, to help facilitate the systems change we urgently need. Having engaged in wider thinking about systems change and having worked in the anti-trafficking and climate sectors, I've had a unique perspective on how and why we need to implement the solutions that we are facilitating here at Opus.

I'm incredibly fortunate to be working alongside the incredibly passionate and pro-active individuals at Opus. When I'm not working, I am enjoying cooking, music, and finding the next city abroad I should visit.



LUCY GAVAGHAN

Operations Manager

I joined Opus as Operations Manager in early September 2025. I'm approaching my role as one of organisational caretaking, tending to the connections between projects, and considering the continual evolution of Opus.

Prior to joining, I was working with global and UK-based Rights of Nature Networks and as a coordinator and freelance researcher focused on participatory decision-making and justice mechanisms. My interest in these areas sprung from a background in activism and education in International Law and International Relations at the University of Edinburgh and Sciences Po Paris.

In 2022, I started an independent storytelling initiative called the pollen project, through which I've grown an understanding of systemic entanglement and explored the need for stories which enable emotionally-rooted responses. Uniting this varied work, there's a need for a unique mix of patience, creativity, and urgency. I'm heartened to be part of a team traversing that together.

EFUA UITERWIJK

Workshop Designer and Facilitator

I joined Opus in 2025 as Workshop Designer and Facilitator. I've had a squiggly route to this work, with a background in outdoor and environmental education, operations management and sustainability consulting. The thread through all of this has been the question "what am I doing in service to the Earth, its ecosystems and societies?"

Over the past several years working as a consultant supporting organisations with system and behaviour change for sustainability, I've been using participatory facilitation methods to co-create pathways to environmentally regenerative and socially equitable action. This has included using systems change and participatory leadership principles from the Art of Hosting, a global community of practice around how to have, and bring broad participation into, conversations that matter.



Photo credit: [Rachel Rae](#)



OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN 2025



This year we held a new and more comprehensive election process for our Board of Directors, with three of our members stepping into one of our Director roles for the first time, as well as a number of people continuing in their positions.

In this section, we'll introduce each of our Directors, and learn a bit about why they're on the Board.

Our Directors are split into Working and Holistic Director roles.

Working Directors

(Day-to-day operational leadership, strategic direction, legal/financial stewardship, carrying organisational risk)

Role purpose: Hold the organisation's operational centre of gravity. Working Directors make timely cross-workflow decisions, carry significant legal/financial and outcome risks, and also contribute to strategy alongside Holistic Directors.

Holistic Directors

(Strategic leadership, long-term policy, outcome risk-holding at the strategic level)

Role purpose: Hold the long-range orientation of Opus — ensuring our policies, resources, and learning systems align with values and future viability. They carry outcome risks at the strategic level and bring horizon insights into collective decisions.

ALBAN KRASHI

Working Director (new)

I am deeply committed to Opus, and particularly to the Demonstrators Portfolio. I actively platform its successes and am fully committed to its potential. I do this because I am wholly invested in the organisation; working for Opus is a privilege, because it can and does demonstrate alternatives to the systems we are looking to change. My purpose is to resolve systemic problems at their root, and to develop solutions collaboratively. But to achieve its potential, Opus has to evolve: to lead by example and be radical in our commitment to challenge ourselves to be better than the systems we're trying to change.

My relationship to Opus started with a transforming and activating places internship, which blossomed into the River Dôn Project, a core project in the Sheffield Demonstrators Portfolio. As of 2025, I continue to coordinate work for the Sheffield Demonstrators Portfolio, and hold responsibilities including cross-workflow strategy, stakeholder alignment, and organisational learning. As co-founder of The River Dôn Project, I convene and steward partnerships across institutions, organisations, and community groups. This ecosystem has required building trust, navigating institutional constraints, stewarding diverse forms of capital, and managing the inherent ambiguity of systemic transition. I bring integrity, strategic thinking, comfort with complexity, and a willingness to navigate uncertainty to this work.



DEBS GRAYSON

Working Director (new)



My motivation for becoming a Working Director is very similar to my motivation for working at Opus: a deep commitment to challenging and changing systems of power, and a desire to be part of making Sheffield a liveable place in the context of collapse. I want to step up to a Director role because Opus is at a crucial time in its organisational development. There are a lot of things that are going right - we have a strong team, some great project work, and some really good internal practices. But other aspects of how we operate, both internally and externally, seem to be holding us back from collaborating in the most effective way with each other, and with the wider city. I want to be part of stewarding the organisation through this period.

The most important lessons I've learned about collaboration, participation and leadership have come from organising and activism - spaces where I'm not there as a 'professional'. I've experienced the highs and lows of collective decision-making in many different forms - in participatory grantmaking, in a tenants union, in non-

hierarchical collectives, in community projects, and in unions and political parties. All of these experiences inform the ways I try to approach collective work, rooted in intersectional feminist principles of equity, supporting marginalised voices to be heard, and holding power in an accountable way.

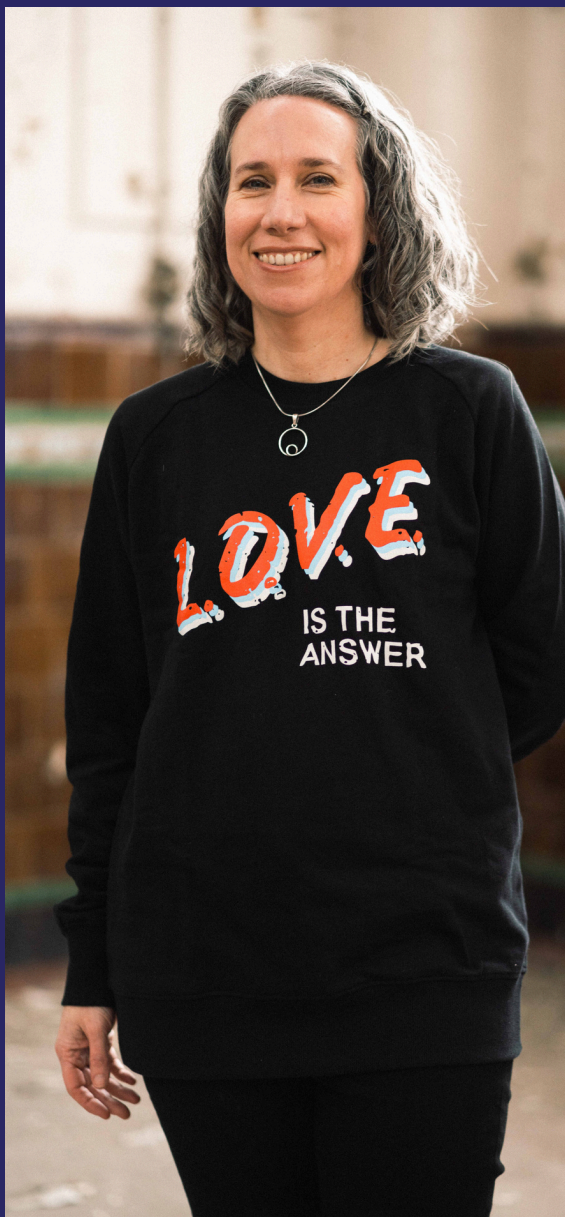
LAURA HOLMES

Working Director (new)

I am fascinated by how organisations work and love being in roles that allow me to 'put my arms around' a whole organisation to see how all the pieces fit together. I am also deeply interested in how people organise themselves towards a common goal, how they build trust, co-ordinate, collaborate and, critically, move through and resolve disagreement and conflict.

As a consequence of following these interests over almost 30 years of working across the public and voluntary sectors, I have amassed quite a bit of experience of working on or with boards of directors or management committees. I aim to hold the responsibilities of Working Director with care and with diligence, sharing the knowledge that I have gathered so far, while listening and learning from the wisdom of others whose experiences differ from my own, both inside and outside Opus.

I feel that there is a huge amount of potential in Opus; in the infrastructure that has grown organically over the last 15 years, and in the skilled and passionate team that have been gathered around the values that we champion. I want to see that potential galvanised to make a real and visible difference to communities in Sheffield.



JAMES LOCK

Working Director (continuing)



I am deeply motivated by Opus' mission, a responsibility to the people who work for Opus, and the scale of change required in this moment. For over 20 years I have been central to Opus' story - co-founding and, at various points, leading many of its major initiatives including Now Then Magazine, Opus Distribution, Opus Presents, Festival of Debate, UBI Lab Network, The River Don Project, Demonstrators Portfolio and City Goals. I am continuing in my role as a Working Director to help shape the organisation's strategy and civic purpose at a time when strong, values-based and systems leadership is essential.

My contribution combines operational delivery, strategic vision, governance, financial stewardship, and the relational work that sustains trust and alignment across our ecosystem. I believe we are living through a pivotal civilisational moment that demands new civic infrastructures, organisational behaviours, economic and democratic capabilities. This belief drives my work ethic and long-term commitment to Opus and its mission. I am continuing as a Working Director to help steward the organisation - ensuring that as we develop, we remain mission-led, participatory and grounded in care.

JOE KRISS

Working Director (continuing)

I've been involved with Opus since its inception after seeing a flyposted poster for a poetry and acoustic music night hosted at The Riverside in 2007. Over almost two decades, Opus has had to gear through many modes of working and my own role at the organisation has shifted alongside it from leading our creative writing programme to the organisation's wider event programme, principally the Festival of Debate and a series of other bespoke projects. Over that time, there has been a need to always be adaptive and responsive to the changing operating conditions of both Opus as an organisation and Sheffield itself but some key things have stayed the same - a need to be bold and innovative, to value equal working relationships and to hold onto the audacity of hope that anything is possible.

I have held the role of Working Director for a decade and Opus is now in a key moment of transition that is presenting new opportunities and risks. As we move forward it's important to hold onto the organisational memory of our different modes of delivery and our beginnings at The Riverside as a collection of writers, activists and event organisers but also to continue to transform and develop new capacities and working principles to meet the challenges ahead.



OLA FAGBOHUN

Holistic Director (continuing)



For nearly thirty years, I've worked with a wide range of people, founders and senior leaders in communities, public and private sectors. I am pleased to be able to share this vast experience of diverse systems and structures, especially in the fields of consumer behaviour, public health, social justice, entrepreneurship, enterprise support and innovation, with Opus in my role as Holistic Director. I love guiding and supporting the diverse people who work at and with Opus to bring their intersecting selves and values into how they work and lead while developing and implementing strategy. I also want to create and be in spaces where we can be honest with empathy and compassion, especially when decisions are made. For me, strategic visioning is a shared process built on trust, care and accountability. I want to make sure that everything we do, and how we do it, is always transparent, ethical and accountable.

Being a Holistic Director at Opus allows me to share the insights I've gained from working with others. I am passionate about systems change that is not performative, and that is the work Opus does. Every person I

interact with at Opus improves my understanding of not only what Opus does and how Opus does it, but also how much they believe in Opus, even in challenging times. I feel privileged to be a part of the Opus family.

SAM WALBY

Holistic Director (previously a Working Director)

According to Companies House I've been a Director since 2013 - and in that time I've more or less dipped my toe into all areas of Opus' work, taking in project delivery and coordination, funding, events, publications, campaigning, comms, strategy, partnership work, admin and finance, Directorship - and DJing at our events.

As such, I've been part of and witness to Opus' evolution in the last 5-7 years in particular, so I know that we're in a unique position for many reasons - a multi-skilled and dynamic team, a portfolio of workstreams and platforms, a 'middle out' position with connections from the grassroots to institutional level, a scope of ambition that I don't see elsewhere in Sheffield, and a significant financial bedrock for the first time.

I think our work to apply system change thinking in place has had some significant, tangible positive effects in the city already. I'm looking forward to reaffirming our mission and shaping our strategic objectives as we enter 2026, because for me there is so much untapped potential in aligning everything we do at Opus more intentionally. As a Coordinator for one of our traditional 'core' workstreams (Now Then magazine), I'm excited about being part of that development work and shaping the strategy that sits behind it.



SARA HILL

Holistic Director (continuing)



I am continuing in the role of Holistic Director because I believe we are at a critical juncture, in which the role of Holistic Directors is increasingly vital. As a whole world of new opportunities for Opus opens up, the purpose of Holistic Directors in holding long term and strategic vision with a deliberate separation from day-to-day delivery will be essential. Not only do we need to ensure that we deliver, we also need to ensure we do this in a way which remains true to our values as an organisation and works in service to the communities we seek to benefit. I see part of the role of Holistic Director as holding these touchstones whilst we work through the complicated and ever-changing project landscape.

I am keen to make sure that Opus remains focused on a core mission that is contributed to and signed up to by all members, and that our work continues to reflect this. I am passionate about the voice of communities and neighbourhoods and making certain they are represented within our work so that the work meets the needs of those neighbourhoods as they identify themselves.

SHIRISH KULKARNI

Holistic Director (continuing)

In the time I've been a Holistic Director I've done my best to bring the things I've learned from long and wide experience working in other organisations, whilst simultaneously learning from the brilliant work going on across Opus. I think I've also been able to fulfil a role as a kind of "critical friend" to the organisation, when looking at some of the key structural questions and challenges that we're facing. I think this is facilitated by being relatively new to Opus, but also by virtue of the fact that I'm "semi-detached" through reasons of geography. I think in my Holistic Director role, this has (perhaps counterintuitively) had a positive impact in enabling me to take a step back and look at the wider picture.

We want Holistic Directors to take a strategic, future-focused role, and I've tried to apply that lens to all my work - whether that be through my involvement in the shaping of the R&D process, the income generation committee, or supporting teams and individuals with knotty questions that have come up in our work.

I feel very deeply connected to the people and work of Opus, and am glad that I've been able to play a small role in supporting members with questions or concerns and, on occasion, to pick those up with Directors or other people in leadership roles in the organisation.





PROJECT UPDATES

2025 was a significant year for many of our projects, with even more collaboration across workflows and a growing network of partners across the city, region, country and the globe.

In this section, we'll share some key updates from each of our projects, alongside reflections on the progress we made this year and what the future might hold.

SHEFFIELD CITY GOALS



Photo credit: [Adva Photography](#)

In November 2024, Opus – working alongside partners including Voluntary Action Sheffield, Citizen Network and Dark Matter Labs – was commissioned by Sheffield City Council to design and develop new collaboration infrastructures to support the delivery of the Sheffield City Goals. The delivery period ran from January through to September 2025.

Rather than focusing on individual projects, this work explored the underlying conditions Sheffield needs to work differently together – city-wide but rooted deeply in neighbourhoods, lived experience and long-term thinking. The brief asked not just what should happen

but how collaboration, decision-making and investment could be reimagined to better serve the city over time.

Working closely with council teams, community organisations, universities, businesses and residents, we co-designed four interconnected infrastructures.

These include *Metrics That Matter* (human-centred ways of measuring what really matters to people's lives), *Next Generations* (new ways for young people to shape decisions that affect their futures), *Neighbourhood Conversations* (supporting democratic participation and action across Sheffield's 147 neighbourhoods), and a *Demonstrator & Investment Fund* to help money flow towards City Goals-aligned projects.

The work was deeply participatory,

involving hundreds of people through workshops, neighbourhood events, youth-led sessions and learning conversations. Opus team members worked across all strands, collaborating with partners, youth organisations and council teams.

Together, the work produced practical blueprints, shared principles and early pathways for action, helping move the City Goals off the page and into everyday life while building trust, shared ownership and the conditions for long-term, collective change.

Photo credit: [Adva Photography](#)



As 2025 ends, this work stands at a meaningful crossroads. The city's new collaboration infrastructures – co-designed through deep participation – have been welcomed with energy and care. There's a shared sense that this work matters, and that it offers a foundation for how we live, decide, and invest differently as a city.

Momentum is growing, not just locally but through connections beyond Sheffield. The visit from Regen Melbourne helped spark fresh ambition, showing how bold "earth shots" could be tethered to the City Goals and anchored in civic infrastructure. This moment of alignment – between big-picture urgency and neighbourhood-level action – feels full of promise.

But real change now depends on what happens next. The emerging Partnership Lab offers one way forward, helping turn designs into action. What's needed is shared commitment: for different actors to step into new roles, take responsibility, and help carry this work forward.

One of the most significant insights from this phase of work was the recognition that the four infrastructures – Metrics That Matter, Next Generations, Neighbourhood Conversations, and the Demonstrator & Investment Fund – don't stand alone. Their real power emerges when treated as interdependent, relationally woven, and mutually reinforcing.

For example, youth-led activity from Next Generations often finds its

grounding in local places, where Neighbourhood Conversations are active. But to be sustainable, that activity may require financial support (Demonstrator Fund) and evidence of value that isn't extractive (Metrics That Matter). Similarly, Metrics supports Neighbourhood Conversations by offering new ways to track what matters in place – not just what's easy to measure.

This led to a shift in approach: rather than building four separate 'pipelines' the work had to build connective tissue – supporting organisations and communities working across multiple domains and designing handoffs and touchpoints between infrastructures.

The learning wasn't just that intersectionality exists, but that it must be intentionally held and resourced. Each infrastructure is more effective when it's in relationship with the others, forming a civic ecosystem where diverse actors, places, and capacities are supported as they are, not forced to fit one model.

Our updates from 2025:

The release of the provocation papers marked an important early moment of confidence. By naming themes across each infrastructure and taking an inquiry-led approach, the papers helped surface shared questions rather than fixed answers. The positive reception from partners across the city confirmed that this way of working – exploratory, reflective and grounded in lived experience – was resonating and opening up productive conversations.

Across four infrastructures, hundreds of people, from neighbourhood groups and young people to civic leaders and institutions, took part in workshops, events and learning conversations. This scale of participation revealed strong alignment in values and intent across very different actors, reinforcing the sense that Sheffield was moving in a shared direction, even where perspectives and priorities differed.

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Photo credit: Adva Photography



A key learning moment came through exploring how Community Development Finance Institutions and the Sheffield Credit Union could work together. This opened up new possibilities for savings, investment and community finance to circulate within the city, reducing reliance on large external capital and strengthening local stewardship and accountability.

The City Goals Festival of Debate events marked an important shift from invited, participatory design spaces into open, public engagement. The events were well attended by people who'd not previously been involved in the work, bringing new perspectives, questions and lived experience into the conversation. This wider public interest demonstrated a strong appetite among citizens to engage with the City Goals and their supporting infrastructures, and helped broaden and deepen the insight informing the work in ways that were both unexpected and very welcome.

Support from the Sheffield Stronger Together Leadership Group in July marked a significant milestone. Their backing of the infrastructure designs signalled confidence in the direction of travel and helped anchor the work within the city's wider leadership and governance landscape.

The visit from Regen Melbourne in November provided a powerful closing moment. Presenting the Sheffield City Goals work to city leaders and community organisations helped situate



Photo credit: [Adva Photography](#)

it within a wider global movement, showing that similar approaches are being explored elsewhere. On the same day, strong attendance at a Metrics That Matter workshop demonstrated continued interest and momentum, signalling that the infrastructures were not an endpoint, but a foundation for what comes next.

SHEFFIELD DEMONSTRATORS



The Sheffield Demonstrators portfolio brings together a set of civic infrastructures that have been emerging, piece-by-piece, in response to a shared realisation: the challenges cities and bioregions now face are deeply interconnected, and no single organisation, project or sector can address them alone.

These challenges are not abstract. They are felt most clearly in place – across neighbourhoods, cities and the bioregional systems that sustain them. It is where economic pressure meets environmental risk; where health, care and inequality intersect with flooding, biodiversity loss and climate breakdown; and where human and ecological systems are revealed to be inseparable. Working at the scale of Sheffield allows these

entangled challenges to be understood, not just conceptually, but practically – as something that can be sensed, worked with and learned from together, across layers of place. The [City Goals](#) have helped create the conditions for this work, offering shared long-term orientations that allow many different actors to move in the same direction while working in different ways.

Different crisis lenses have shaped how this work has been approached. Polycrisis helps name how social, ecological and economic challenges interact and compound. Permacrisis reflects the lived experience of accelerating pressure and shortening cycles of disruption. Metacrisis points to something deeper still: the underlying ways of seeing and organising the world – ideas of

separation, competition and extraction, that shape not only institutions and economies but everyday behaviours, relationships and assumptions about what is normal or possible.

Taken together, these lenses suggest the core challenge is not a lack of effort or goodwill, but a lack of capacity to collaborate across complexity.

These infrastructures are not projects in the conventional sense. They are scaffolding for complex collaboration – designed to help neighbourhoods, institutions, data, finance and decision-making align, learn and adapt together over time, and across scales of place. Each addresses a different part of the collaboration challenge, but they are designed to work in relationship, not

isolation.

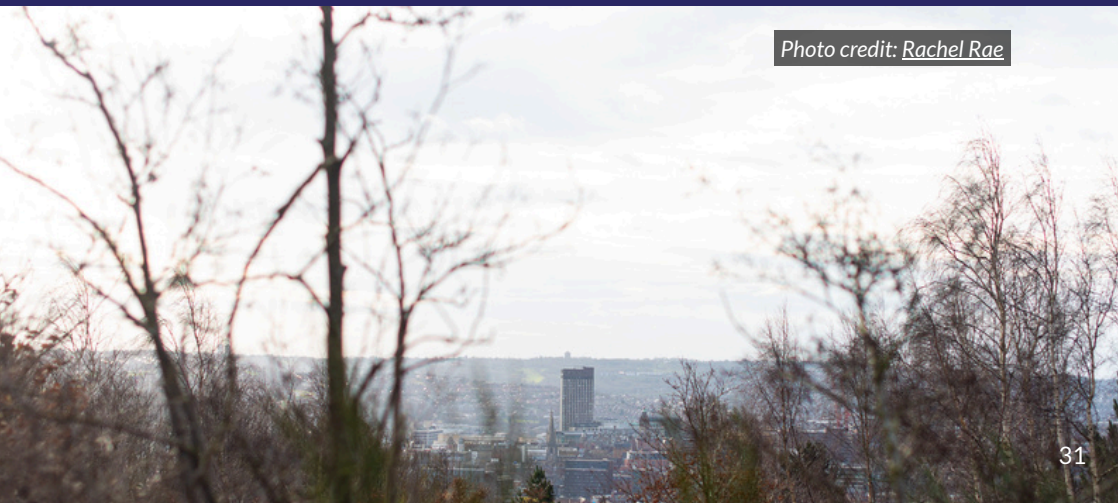
Opus has contributed to this work as one steward among many, alongside partners including Dark Matter Labs, Voluntary Action Sheffield, Citizen Network and Data for Action Sheffield, and hundreds of people across Sheffield's neighbourhoods and institutions.

Supported by funders such as Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Novo Foundation, and by public sector partners including Sheffield City Council, this portfolio reflects a shared, careful exploration – testing whether more relational, adaptive and collective ways of working can take root, and be sustained, in the places and ecosystems where they matter most.

Civic infrastructures: a definition

Civic infrastructures are systems that enable collective intelligence, supporting shared learning, decision-making and action among people, communities and institutions working together in place on complex, long-term challenges.

Photo credit: Rachel Rae



Sheffield Demonstrators stands at a vital and vulnerable moment. Over the past year, these civic designs have moved from early sketches to shared commitments, shaped by the energy, care and contribution of people from across the city and beyond. Coalitions have formed, relationships have deepened and a shared appetite for working differently has begun to take root. What's emerging is not just a set of tools or plans, but a way of working that is relational, place-based, and future-facing.

But this work doesn't yet sit on stable ground. Political volatility, funding fragility and institutional churn press in. There's growing recognition that we need more joined-up, long-term ways of working, but we're still learning how to do that, together. Complex problems like climate breakdown, inequality, and the erosion of public trust don't have quick fixes. They need forms of collaboration that are just as complex, just as layered, and just as alive – and yet still simple enough to be understood, felt, and taken up by many. Simple enough to feel possible.

This portfolio sits across those layers – from the rhythms of local neighbourhoods to the wide view of Sheffield as a bioregional system. That gives us a chance to build civic capacity that's grounded and connected. But it also asks a deeper question: how do we create coherence without losing the richness of difference? In a world that's changing fast, where certainty is rare,

what kind of civic culture can hold us together without holding us back? That's the crossroads: do we invest in making this way of working durable, not just deliverable? Do we embed these infrastructures deeply enough that they can weather the next storm? What gives us hope is the fact that we've come this far – not just with ideas, but with people. Communities, institutions, funders, public servants, citizens are all pulling in the same direction, even while walking different paths. That's rare – and it's worth protecting.

Photo credit: [Rachel Rae](#)



Collaboration Infrastructures which make up the portfolio

The River Dôn Project

The River Dôn Project is a place-based initiative within Opus's Sheffield Demonstrators portfolio, focused on reconnecting people, communities and institutions with the rivers of Sheffield and South Yorkshire, with a particular emphasis on the River Don. The project responds to interconnected challenges including pollution, flooding, biodiversity loss and climate breakdown, and works to build the civic, technological and ecological conditions needed for rivers and communities to recover and thrive together.

The project builds on a landscape already rich with care – including community groups, charities, social enterprises, artists, researchers and civic organisations who have long worked to protect and steward the River Don and the wider catchment. Its role is connective: helping existing efforts align, share learning and act collectively across the catchment, rather than duplicating

what's already happening.

The River Dôn Project takes shape through five interconnected strands: Arts & Culture, Communities & Campaigns, Law & Policy, Technology, and Research. Together, these strands form a living civic infrastructure that brings ecological data, lived experience, cultural practice and governance innovation into relationship. Tools such as shared sensing, data storytelling, Living Stewardship Agreements and collaborative learning spaces support participation, accountability and coordinated action.

By weaving together science and story, local action and civic systems, the project enables people and institutions to participate in the care and governance of the river. In doing so, it contributes directly to our City Goals for a green and resilient Sheffield, while strengthening collective capacity for long-term stewardship of water, land and life.

Photo credit: [Rachel Rae](#)



Next Generations Infrastructure

The Next Generations Infrastructure is one of the civic infrastructures developed through the Sheffield City Goals. Its purpose is to make sure young people, and the interests of future generations, are meaningfully involved in how the city makes decisions and takes action today.

The infrastructure builds on the many youth organisations, schools, neighbourhood groups and city-wide initiatives already working with young people across Sheffield. It does not replace this work. Instead, it helps connect existing youth activity into the wider City Goals collaboration, so young people's perspectives, knowledge and priorities can shape neighbourhood action, city leadership and long-term thinking.

It creates opportunities for participation at both city-wide and neighbourhood levels. Young people are supported to take part in the Sheffield Stronger Together Leadership Group, contributing

directly to strategic conversations about Sheffield's future. In neighbourhoods, young people participate in Neighbourhood Conversations, sharing lived experience, influencing local priorities and learning alongside older generations.

The infrastructure also supports youth-led research through the Metrics That Matter framework, and youth-led ideas, projects and campaigns through the Youth-led Action Generator and the Demonstrator & Investment Fund. Intergenerational Skills Clinics and Sensemaker Clinics provide training and support, helping young people and adults build the confidence and skills needed to work well together.

Overall, the Next Generations Infrastructure helps Sheffield grow a culture of intergenerational reciprocity - where learning, responsibility, and influence flow both ways between generations - strengthening the city's ability to act together over the long term.

Sheffield Data Co-operative and Metrics That Matter

The Sheffield Data Co-operative is a new civic data infrastructure developed through the Sheffield City Goals. Its role is to support more open, shared and collaborative ways of using data across the city - helping neighbourhoods, communities, public services, businesses and city leaders learn together about

what's changing in Sheffield, and where action is most needed.

The Co-operative acts as a shared hub for data that is held across different institutions and communities. It brings together quantitative data (such as service use or environmental indicators)

with qualitative insight (people's lived experience, stories and local knowledge), and makes this information accessible, transparent and useful for decision-making at different levels.

One of the Data Co-operative's key functions is to develop and steward the Metrics That Matter: a set of relatable and accessible measures that track progress towards the Sheffield City Goals. These metrics are designed to reflect what matters in everyday life, and to reveal connections across complex systems such as health, transport, environment and care. They are not

targets, but tools for shared learning, dialogue and accountability.

Through open dashboards, summaries and regular reporting, the Data Co-operative supports neighbourhood decision-making, youth-led research through the Next Generations infrastructure, outcome verification for the Demonstrator & Investment Fund, and informed leadership through Sheffield Stronger Together. Overall, it helps build a city-wide culture of curiosity, trust and collective learning – using data to support long-term, collaborative change.

Neighbourhood Conversations

Neighbourhood Conversations is one of the civic infrastructures developed through the Sheffield City Goals. Its purpose is to strengthen neighbourhood governance and decision-making, enabling people in Sheffield's neighbourhoods to shape priorities, take action, and contribute to the city's shared goals in ways that reflect local needs and strengths.

Sheffield is made up of at least 147 self-defined neighbourhoods, and this infrastructure starts from the understanding that neighbourhoods are where civic life is lived day-to-day. Neighbourhood Conversations builds on existing community activity and leadership, helping neighbourhoods organise themselves, make decisions collectively, and connect their actions

into wider city systems.

At the heart of the infrastructure are Neighbourhood Anchor Organisations – trusted local organisations that convene inclusive conversations, support democratic participation, and help residents develop neighbourhood visions, priorities and projects. These conversations bring together residents, community groups, young people, businesses, and public services to deliberate, decide and act together.

The infrastructure also supports Neighbourhood Funds, linked to the Sheffield Transition Financing Facility, enabling neighbourhoods to access funding and resources to deliver locally-led action. Shared data and insight – including through Metrics That Matter –

supports neighbourhood decision-making and learning across the city. Neighbourhood Conversations connects neighbourhood governance to city-wide leadership through Local Area Committees and Sheffield Stronger

Together, while creating spaces for cross-neighbourhood learning and collaboration. Overall, it helps Sheffield grow into a more confident, connected and democratic city, neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

Sheffield Transition Financing Facility (STFF)

The Sheffield Transition Financing Facility (STFF) is a civic infrastructure that helps Sheffield organise money, decision-making and learning around the changes the city wants to see. It acts as a shared civic backbone – connecting neighbourhood action, city-wide priorities and long-term investment so they can reinforce one another.

STFF works across neighbourhood and city scales at the same time. In neighbourhoods, it supports locally-led priorities through flexible neighbourhood funds and inclusive governance, helping people come together, decide what matters, and develop early ideas in ways that feel safe, fair and legitimate. Alongside this, a Neighbourhood Outcome Accelerator provides hands-on support to help those early ideas grow, clarify their outcomes and become stronger propositions over time.

At a city level, STFF brings organisations together around shared challenges through a City Outcome Accelerator, helping translate neighbourhood learning and city ambitions into

investable portfolios. This work is supported by the Outcome Holders Alliance – a growing group of public bodies, businesses and institutions who recognise shared risks and agree to work together around shared outcomes.

STFF also develops the financial, legal and governance structures needed to move capital responsibly – from early grant and philanthropic funding to longer-term civic, social and institutional investment. This includes testing new instruments, governance models and ways of sharing risk.

Overall, the STFF is not a single fund or programme. It is a system for transition, designed to help Sheffield move carefully and collectively, so that money flows into change that is rooted in neighbourhood life, aligned across the city, and capable of lasting over time.

Photo credit: [Rachel Rae](#)



Sheffield Partnership Lab

The Sheffield City Goals Partnership Lab is a civic infrastructure designed to help the city work together on challenges that no single organisation, sector or neighbourhood alone can solve. Its role is to act as connective tissue, linking the City Goals, the different civic infrastructures, and the Sheffield Stronger Together Leadership Group, so collaboration across the city becomes easier, clearer and more joined-up.

The Partnership Lab does not deliver projects itself. Instead, it supports others to do so. It helps ideas, learning, relationships and resources move across the system, connecting neighbourhood insight, youth perspectives, data, funding and leadership decisions into a more coherent whole.

In its early phase, the Partnership Lab is expected to be hosted by an independent, trusted organisation in the city, providing a stable home for this

connective work. Over time, the Lab may evolve into a more independent structure, shaped by learning and need.

Day to day, the Partnership Lab supports leadership coordination, gathers learning and stories from across the City Goals, and shares them back in accessible ways. It convenes partners around shared challenges, supports early collaboration and experimentation, helps align funding and commitments, and works closely with infrastructures such as Neighbourhood Conversations, Next Generation, Metrics That Matter and the Sheffield Transition Financing Facility.

Through this work, the Partnership Lab helps build shared understanding, stronger relationships and greater confidence across Sheffield's civic ecosystem – creating the conditions for long-term collaboration that can adapt as people, priorities and challenges change over time.




Photo credit: [Rachel Rae](#)

NOW THEN MAGAZINE



Now Then Featured Artist - Just Another Hustler

Now Then magazine is an independent magazine for Sheffield, focused on modelling a different kind of journalism – one which plays an active role in building a better world.

The Now Then team has again done some stellar work this year. We've continued to show up for people, communities, partners and for Opus itself, while holding the tension and the challenge of being embedded in both grassroots action and systems change work – two worlds which are often speaking different languages and thinking differently about how positive social change happens.

The choices we're presented with in Now Then at this point are symptomatic of the bigger questions Opus as a whole has

"Our vision of journalism recognises that we are ourselves participants in society, who want to see change happen and whose articulation of that participation is an asset to their work"

been engaging with for years: How do we balance impact and values with financial sustainability? How do we continue to evolve and be alive to change in our work? How do we bring ourselves closer to people, their lived experiences and their perspectives without losing sight of our strategic objectives? How do we become more intentional in the storytelling and convening we do across all of Opus's work, and what value or capabilities might this unlock, for us and

for Sheffield? And if the resulting work is not journalism, how do we describe it?

2026 holds a lot of promise for us. In the past few months in particular we've opened up a conversation about the future of Now Then and have made some fascinating connections as a result.

We're part of discussions within Opus about how our storytelling projects – in particular Now Then, Festival of Debate, People's Newsroom and Opus Productions – could be better integrated and have a more focused impact. We're looking forward to working closely with folks in the River Dôn Project on two initiatives and we're starting to

consider how Now Then could return to print – it's been too long.

The best thing that could happen for Now Then in 2026 is that we trust our skills, experience and each other, and lean into the direction we're already pointing towards.

Our updates from 2025:

In January, we launched our new Support Us page, alongside a video crafted by Opus Productions.

In July, we published a collective editorial piece with the intention of deepening our connection with communities across Sheffield and South Yorkshire. Since then, we've had lots of fascinating conversations that have shaped our plans for the future of Now Then. If you haven't got in touch with us yet and would like to, it's never too late – drop us a line at editor@weareopus.org

We're continuing to work on developing ideas about how we can work more closely with other projects across Opus, including Festival of Debate, The People's Newsroom and Opus Productions. Watch this space!

As always, the bread-and-butter of Now Then is our journalism. We've been showing up for Sheffield for nearly 20 years, supporting local people, groups and offering a platform for information and insight that just wouldn't otherwise be accessible to many people, and shining

Illustration: Bryony Finnigan.



a spotlight on what we see as the best of our city. This year, we published 237 articles and sent 48 newsletters, and we're really proud of the work we've done.

Sadly, we also had to say goodbye to our valued team member Maryam Jameela this year, who has done so much for Now Then and Opus as a whole, and will be deeply missed.

237

articles
published

48

newsletters
sent

2,694

subscribed to
our mailing list



FESTIVAL OF DEBATE



Photo credit: [Adva Photography](#)

The Festival of Debate is the UK's largest annual politics and activism festival, creating opportunities to bring people together to share new ideas and lived experiences that can help shape our understanding of the world.

This year marked ten years of running the Festival of Debate. Our operating model has remained largely constant over that time, with an open call for partner-run events and a core keynote programme designed by Opus staff.

Yet at this milestone we find ourselves needing to evaluate how far the festival has come and where it's going. Ten years feels like a natural point to take stock, but there are some factors forcing our hand: inflationary pressures have risen

5,000+

tickets issued for our 2025 programme

dramatically since the pandemic, and even after almost doubling our ticket income in 2025 compared to 2024, we operated the festival at a loss.

Opus as an organisation has also changed and is in transition – the learning and connections established through the festival itself, the Demonstrators portfolio and other system change practitioners and organisations need time to settle and take root. We need to understand what the next version of the Festival of Debate is that will see us out for the next ten years.

Our updates from 2025:

This year, we hosted a programme of more than 60 events, with headliners Kate Raworth, Jason Hickel, Lanre Bakare, Shon Faye, John Harris, Laura Bates, Jeremy Corbyn, Andy Burham, Joycelyn Longdon and Kehinde Andrews.

Alongside our headliners, we partnered with organisations across the city to deliver events on a wide range of themes, including rights of nature, community ownership, union organising and more, and across various formats such as panel discussions, workshops, art exhibitions and live music.

We commissioned [Lisa O'Hara](#) to create beautiful cover artwork for our brochure on the theme of 'imagination infrastructure'. Lisa told us that she chose to focus on a mycelium network in her design because she "thought it would be a fitting metaphor for what can happen when humans connect with each other and with nature. Everything is connected and one act can affect our surroundings and our communities."

We also commissioned [Ben PMA](#), [Black Lodge Press](#), [Nasha Cash](#) and [Suzi Kemp](#) to create posters for the festival, which you can see overleaf.

We [announced in Now Then](#) that we'll be taking a break from delivering the full Festival of Debate programme next year, to take time to think about how the festival can play a more active role in building the new systems that we urgently need. However, we'll still be hosting six headline events throughout 2026 that will welcome some of the most interesting and radical systems change thinkers to Sheffield.



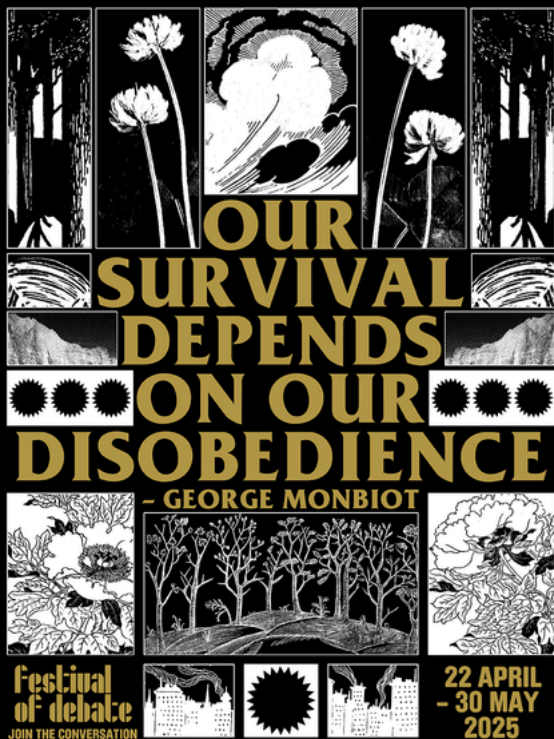
Illustration: [Lisa O'Hara](#)

CARE IS THE ANTIDOTE TO VIOLENCE

Festival
of debate

- SAIDIYA HARTMAN

APRIL 22ND
- MAY 30TH




**OUR
SURVIVAL
DEPENDS
ON OUR
DISOBEDIENCE**
- GEORGE MONBIOT

Festival
of debate
JOIN THE CONVERSATION

22 APRIL
- 30 MAY
2025


"THERE IS
NO END
TO
WHAT
A
LIVING
WORLD
WILL
DEMAND
OF YOU"



- OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

Festival
of debate
22 April - 30 May 2025

JOIN THE CONVERSATION



"ALL FLOURISHING
IS MUTUAL"

- ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

Festival
of debate
22 April - 30 May 2025

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

WORDLIFE



Photo credit: Tim Feben

Live literature event series Wordlife is now the home for Sheffield's Reading Room, part of The Reading Room network: a group of activists that run book events across the UK.

In 2025, we pioneered a brand new event series called Sandbox, encouraging people to get 'hands-on' with some of the most exciting and fresh ideas of our time, exploring how they could work in practice right here in Sheffield.

Reading Rooms and Sandbox are in an early emerging phase, and give us an opportunity to experiment with what an ongoing public event programme for Opus could look like.

What kind of stories do we want to tell about systems change? What event formats offer the greatest possibilities for bringing change about? How can we make the most of the expertise and energy of participants and audiences as well as authors and activists? How can we engender both a sense of possibility and urgency while being honest about the challenges we face?

Crucially, these events need to consider how we build community.

The best thing that could happen is we create a playful, interactive, generative space where people from different backgrounds and with different skills and talents can build solutions for a just transition.

“We live in a world of bullshit abundance and artificial scarcity: a world where we have too much of what we don’t need and too little of what we do.”

– Radical Abundance

Our updates from 2025:

In October, we held an exciting ‘in conversation’ event with Keir Milburn and Debs Grayson about Keir’s new book *Radical Abundance*. This was followed by discussion groups hosted by Now Then exploring how we can “create a world of true abundance” right here in Sheffield, using the Public Commons Partnership model explored in the book.

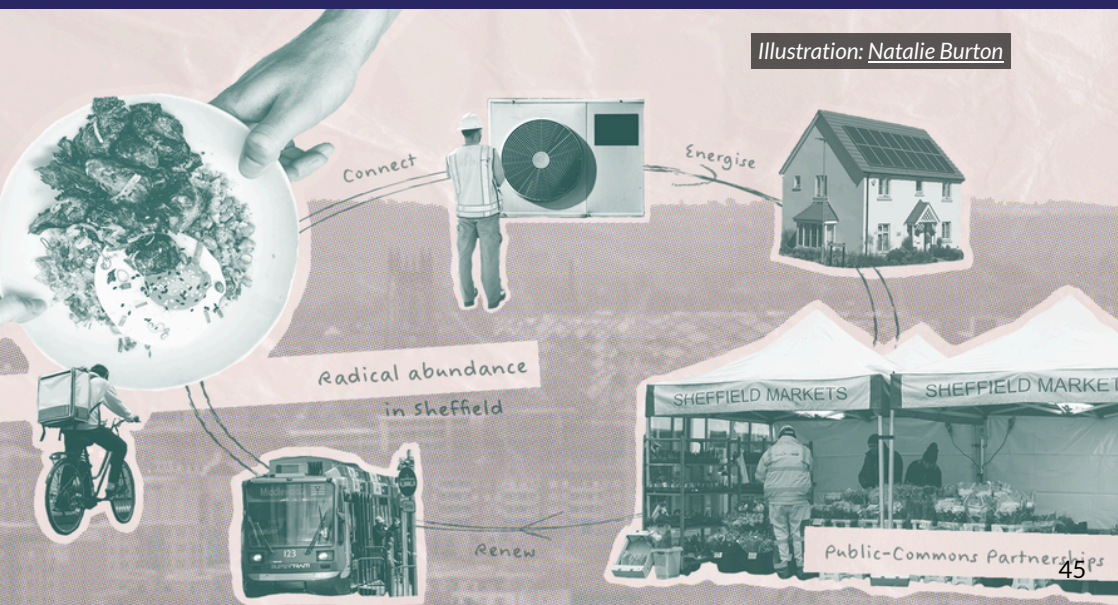
Following this, Now Then published [an illustrated article](#) sketching out four imagined but possible futures for Sheffield, based on the ideas shared in each of the discussion groups.

In November, we launched our new

Sheffield event series *Sandbox*, with an event exploring *How Cities Collaborate For Transformation*. The basis for this event was the *Sheffield City Goals*, six stories co-created by the people of Sheffield that reflect our shared values, hopes and collective ambition.

In Australia, Regen Melbourne have been leading a similar process. At the event, we heard from Alison Whitten, Director of Systems Lab (formerly Research Lead at Regen Melbourne) and Helen Sims, CEO of Voluntary Action Sheffield, who explored how cities can learn from one another in reimagining civic life for the 21st century. Following the event, we shared this [write-up](#) in *Now Then* magazine.

Illustration: [Natalie Burton](#)



THE PEOPLE'S NEWSROOM



Illustration: Charlotte Bailey

The People's Newsroom is a hub that creates learning and action for people and organisations to face the many interlinked crises that stand in front of us with imagination, vision and new processes for returning stories and storytelling to our communities.

The best thing to happen to The People's Newsroom this year has been our shaping from the outside in. From our book club (Storytellers Working Towards Regenerative Futures), to the development of our 'Lessons for a Story Commons' series, to our 'Story of Sheffield – Research and Development Workshop', we have been shaped not by storytellers in the professional sense but by those who identify the storyteller that

"The stories we tell each other inform what is possible between us and enable us to see new ways of relating and being in the world, with one another and with nature"

exists in all of us.

Charity workers, community organisers, artists and youth organisers have joined our coalition and shaped the way we think about creating stories through a commons. The best thing that could happen in the future is for every part of Opus, and more widely all of our public services, to be shaped by the storyteller that exists in all of us. Together we might enable new narratives to pave the way for thriving futures in Sheffield and beyond.



Illustration: Charlotte Bailey

A
STORY
COMMONS

Our updates from 2025:

We launched the People's Newsroom Book Club back in April, and were joined by a wide range of attendees from across the world as we explored *Hospicing Modernity* by Vanessa Machado de Oliveira. There was a real sense of spaces like this feeling needed and appreciated.

In November, we held a Research and Development day at Utopia Theatre,

exploring the next stage of the story commons work in Sheffield.

We've just published our [Lessons from a Story Commons](#) series, accompanied by a set of illustrations created by [Charlotte Bailey](#) who represented CIVIC SQUARE during our first People's Newsroom learning cohort.

Photo credit: People's Newsroom



GENERATIVE JOURNALISM ALLIANCE



The Generative Journalism Alliance comprises storytellers and systems change practitioners located around the world. We use generative interviewing to create space for people to make sense of the world and the work they do, nurture relationships and catalyse change through a plurality of stories.

The Generative Journalism Alliance (GJA) finds itself at a crossroads between depth and reach. On one side is work that's slow, relational and situated: collective inquiries, staying with complexity, allowing stories to emerge over time and trusting that in their plurality, narratives emerge. This is where much of GJA's integrity and distinctiveness lives. On the other side is

the pull toward wider reach: clearer narratives, funder-framed language, and stories that can travel more easily across platforms. So at this crossroads we're wondering: How much can the work be stretched without flattening the very qualities that make it generative? Choosing depth risks remaining marginal, hard to explain and under-resourced. Choosing reach risks simplification, extractive storytelling or reproducing the logics we're trying to unsettle.

GJA has offered the gift of slowing down, listening carefully and taking people's lived experiences seriously. It has given language to work that often remains invisible – sensemaking, relational labour and learning in transition. In our '[just transition](#)' inquiry we surfaced some powerful stories and connected people

who weren't aware of each other before, and in the [Lankelly legacy work](#) we held many difficult stories of harm and managed to find ways to share these generatively while still honouring people's experiences.

In return, GJA has received trust – often before it felt fully earned. We've been

“This is journalism not as spectacle, but as stewardship. We're here to hold stories, not extract them. To generate new life from old truths. To create the kind of narrative ground where different futures can take root”

welcomed into intimate, uncertain spaces where people are experimenting at the edges of systems. Notable moments include: Carrina Gaffney bringing us into the Lankelly work and being a strong advocate for GJA over the past year, Sam G and Maryam doing some quick editing work during our crunch period in the spring, and Laura dealing with some unexpected financial chaos – thank you all!

Our updates from 2025:

Since 2024, we've been working on a generative inquiry commissioned by Lankelly Chase exploring the legacy of the organisation. As part of this work we spoke to more than 50 individuals, including grantees, advisors, ex-staff and trustees, asking the question: 'What can we learn from the Lankelly Chase experience?'. You can [read the full series online](#).

We also worked on a generative storytelling inquiry about the concept of a Just Transition, and have begun [publishing pieces on our Substack](#).



UBI LAB NETWORK



The UBI Lab Network supports a worldwide decentralised network of citizens, researchers and activists working to build a more just society by exploring and advocating for the potential of UBI as the foundation for tackling the challenges we face as individuals, communities, societies and as a planet.

There are a number of tensions we've been holding in this work in 2025. There's opportunities in Manchester and Liverpool, with the musicians pitch that we've now evolved into being a national pilot. Those could move forward with the right will, and the stuff in Manchester is actually moving quite productively – it's just behind-the-scenes. There's stuff we

can't really talk about that's heading towards a positive outcome.

With the musicians pilot, there's no momentum in the UK for it. But Ireland making their pilot permanent speaks volumes, and hopefully sets a precedent. Another tension we're holding is people's belief as to whether change is even possible, with Labour being no better, if not worse, than the previous government in terms of their willingness to stand for anything. There's also not necessarily tangible things to aim at, like when we got the pilot in Wales.

There's also just the attrition of people's time, energy and capacity since the pandemic. I think there's a loss of belief that change is possible without another crisis – unfortunately we saw the biggest

change from the pandemic. We just need something to interrupt the flow of what's happening – but that's the way the Network has evolved throughout its history.

Our updates from 2025:

In February, we launched our Basic Income for Greater Manchester proposal, outlining plans for a feasible, affordable and popular Universal Basic Income pilot for the region.

We also held a briefing session for MPs in the Palace of Westminster exploring 'Basic Income and Regrowth'.

Members of the Network did numerous in-person and online talks at different events and for various groups, were interviewed on podcasts, and had media

stories written about their work.

We made significant progress towards the first English Basic Income pilot in Greater Manchester – more news soon!

We reached the milestone of the 50th Lab being founded: UBI Lab Colombia.

We pitched the 'Music Sounds Better With You' Liverpool pilot to Mayor Steve Rotherham and soft launched the evolution of this.

We took the UBI Lab Manchester Roadshow back to the streets of Manchester.

Towards the end of the year, we launched our Universal Basic Income Toolkit, a detailed UBI 101 toolkit aimed at breaking the myths surrounding UBI and showing what is possible.



Photo credit: UBI Lab Network



OPUS SERVICES

Alongside our many projects, Opus is also home to a number of services which are designed to enable our clients to tell their own stories. Facilitation, curiosity and an appetite for listening are at the heart of what we do.

Read on to find out what our diligent Productions and Distribution teams have been up to in 2025. If you'd like to find out more about the services we offer, [take a look at our website.](#)

OPUS DISTRIBUTION



For over 15 years Opus Distribution has been providing unique print distribution opportunities exclusively to local independent traders, community groups, arts organisations, charities, educational institutions and local government.

We're committed to providing a comprehensive, affordable, and diligently delivered distribution service for the arts, independent traders, charities, community groups, local government, and educational institutions of Sheffield and its surrounding areas.

We also maintain the commitment to serve the more underserved communities across the region, doing our best to make sure we're accessible to all who need their work, stories, and ideas to be seen and heard.

A foundational principle of our work is to cultivate and nurture lasting

relationships with both our partners and the outlets which display the materials we distribute.

It's a gift to ensure that we acknowledge the collective contributions of all of the people in our network of outlets, and to be able to play an active role in amplifying the work of so many crucial components of the local community.

Perhaps the greatest gift of all though is the trust that so many people have placed in us over the years, and continue to place in us, to deliver on our promises to them and to the wider communities they serve in turn.

Our updates from 2025:

In April, we supported the Festival of Debate to distribute their brochures across Sheffield. We had a fantastic response from the people and places we visited – most were gone within the week!

From July to August this year we launched a new summer flash sale campaign, which brought lots of new interest.

Throughout the year, we've distributed printed materials for our partners across South Yorkshire, including Sheffield DocFest, Migration Matters Festival, Sheffield Pint of Science, Barnsley Civic,

“A great way to ensure the product you are promoting is seen right across the city and outer reaches of Sheffield. The team at Opus are friendly and flexible. It's also great to see where our print has gone to thanks to their comprehensive distribution reports”

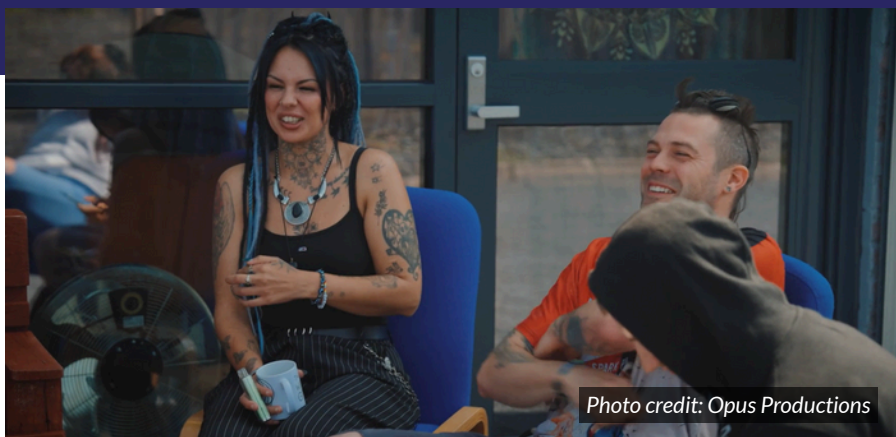
– Sheffield Theatres

Rotherham Museums, Flux Rotherham, Rotherham's Children's Capital of Culture, Rotherham Civic Theatre, Right Up Our Street and loads more.

Photo credit: Opus Distribution



OPUS PRODUCTIONS



Opus Productions is the production department of Opus. We seek to communicate ideas, help make sense of the world around us, and paint a picture of the society we want to live in.

Our client work is one of Opus's income-generating work streams, and it shows potential for further growth. It lets us build relationships with a wider range of organisations and partners, and it can help us spot opportunities for stronger alignment with Opus's other work. But even when it's values aligned, it's usually smaller projects shaped by client agendas, using up crucial department capacity that could be supporting Opus's core missions.

In parallel, there's the mission path: supporting Opus by capturing the journey of transition, sharing stories, and creating ways to bring the work to life. Production can capture ideas and lived experience directly, explain complex ideas, and add a needed emotional layer,

especially given the importance of shaping and communicating narrative in our work.

In practice we've often taken on paying client work at the expense of internally-led projects that aren't profitable at first. As a small department, growing capacity is hard: meeting industry pay, winning more work to support more staff, and managing delivery. This may change if Opus workstreams align around a stronger core offer, or if larger-scale media projects come into view.

The best thing that could happen is that we build enough capacity to run both strands of our work in parallel – growing values-led client work for income and relationships, while protecting real time

for core Opus mission storytelling – without one constantly crowding out the other.

Ideally we'd not just deliver outputs but shape narratives that help people come on the journey: making complex ideas feel real, bringing the work to life through people's voices and experience, and adding an emotional layer that supports hope, agency and action. Client work can still sustain the department and widen our network, but we can be more intentional, using those relationships to spot shared aims and open up deeper collaboration,

shared learning, or co-commissioned stories. Over time, more of our production becomes part of a wider Opus offer that also contributes income, making the need for external client work less acute. That gives us options: expand the team, or phase down client work.

Alongside this, we build work like a successful podcast series and mini-documentaries that document transition efforts, inspire participation, and create opportunities to tell a larger story about root issues and what transition looks like in practice.

Our updates from 2025:

Early this year, we re-branded from Opus Films to Opus Productions, to better represent the work we do (i.e. video and documentary content, alongside exhibition, artwork and, in 2026, podcasting).

We filmed a documentary in partnership with the Sheffield Social Enterprise Network, [Social Enterprising The Transitions Ahead](#), which had a number of screenings at The Showroom (set for public release in 2026)

We supported Festival of Debate 2025 with lots of video content, including shorts with [Laura Bates](#) and [Joycelyn Longdon](#)

We were commissioned for a project supporting Camerados and have been off around the UK visiting their public living

Photo credit: Opus Productions



rooms, to produce video content for their Public Living Rooms project.

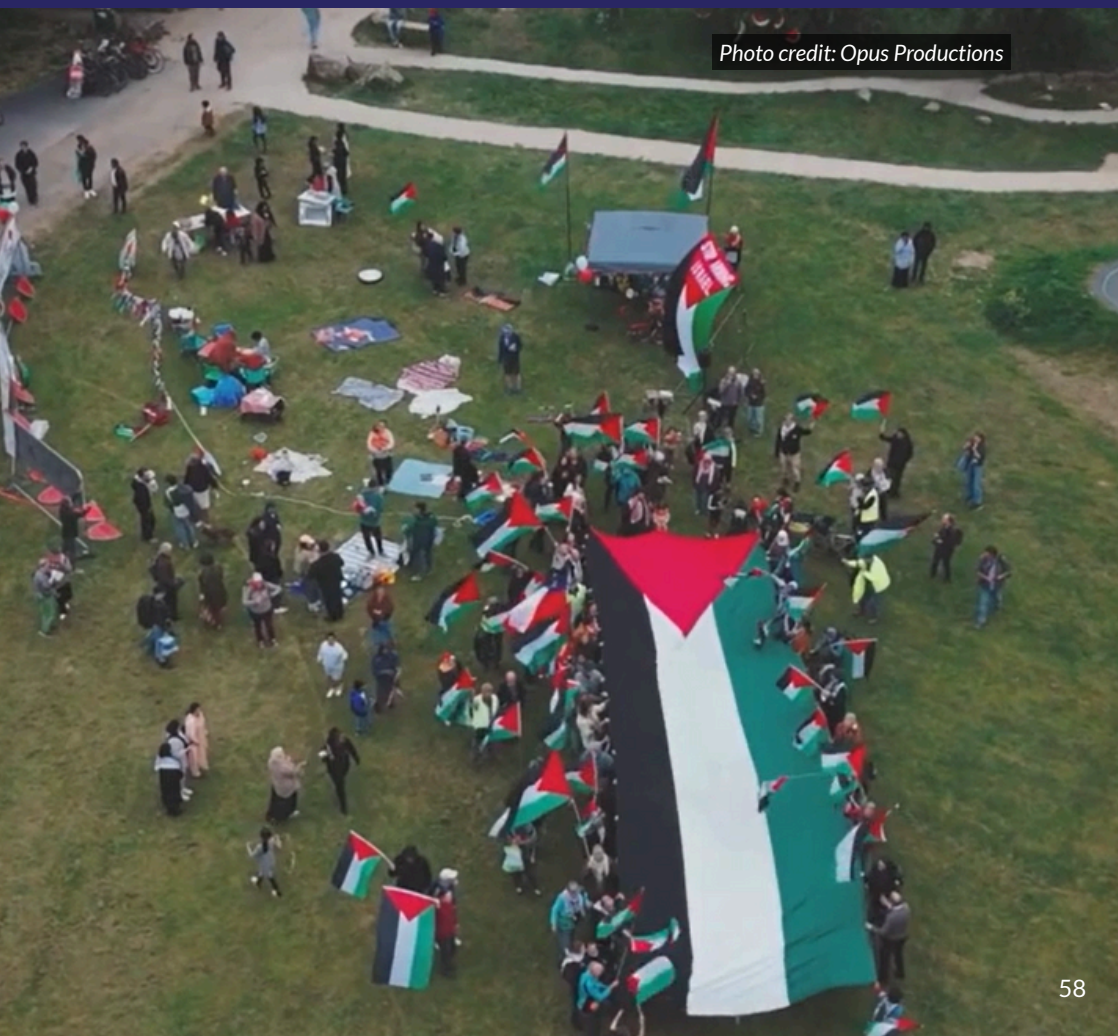
We worked with the NHS Chaplaincy department to produce a series of digital resources to support their services, including a 3D interactive model of the chapel at Hallamshire, with embedded practitioner videos to support bed-bound patients.

We've been working with the River

Rights Network to support their series of conferences and various hosts from different rivers, such as a short featuring the River Dôn Project, alongside filming lectures and other content from the conference.

We completed two short documentaries in partnership with IDirect, sharing the story of people transitioning out of institutional care.

Photo credit: Opus Productions





WORKFLOW UPDATES

At the heart of Opus are a number of key workflows that keep the organisation running. This year, we've grown our core team, with Laura Holmes stepping in as Finance Coordinator and Lucy Gavaghan taking up the brand new role of Operations Manager.

In this section, we'll share some key updates from the Operations, Finance and Communications teams, as well as reflections on the key tensions we are holding within each of these strands of work.

OPERATIONS



Photo credit: *Adva Photography*

In September this year we welcomed Lucy Gavahgan to the team, who has taken up the role of Operations Manager. For more information on our future plans for Operations at Opus, see [this section](#). Lucy tells us more...

As Operations Manager at Opus, I'm working with several linked tensions. One is between structure and freedom – between offering enough clarity that everyone can navigate their roles confidently, while avoiding over-systematisation that dims each person's autonomy. I often wonder, how do we create an enabling working environment that offers sufficient guidance without being overly managerial or creating hierarchies that limit the agency of each of our members? Opus is worker-owned and worker-led. Every member has a

vote in key decisions and is paid the same hourly rate.

We see these as active choices, signaling a critique of hierarchical work structures. We want to foster an environment in which members follow their curiosities, channeling insights and experiences as they choose. This creates tension between the freedom to move between workflows and giving members guidance on how they use their time.

But these tensions are not problems to solve: they're the pulse of a complex, living organisation. I try to remind myself that it isn't anyone's work to eliminate them, but to continually tend to them via shared rhythms, accountability processes and holistic evaluations of how our shared time is spent.

FINANCE



There are two key tensions it's been important to hold in the Finance Workflow this year:

Between resourcing ourselves and resourcing the work. How we steward resources is a critical question for an organisation oriented towards just and liveable futures. In such urgent times, money and resources need to flow rather than remain stagnant. But with our work focused on creating systems that enable that wider flow of resources across our city (see [the STFF](#)), we also need to ensure our own stability so that we can bring that work to fruition. Providing an infrastructure that attracts and nurtures a team that can both do their work well and remain well in their work is vital.

Between financial visibility and financial

dominance. Financial literacy is a critical skill for a worker-controlled organisation – the decisions we make together are only as good as the information that underpins them. Much of this year has been about strengthening internal processes and improving the quality and understanding of financial information. However, we must guard against this increased emphasis and visibility leading to financial factors becoming overprioritised, when mission and impact need to remain our north stars.

Our updates from 2025:

This year we received unrestricted funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to support our core organisational activity over the next five years.

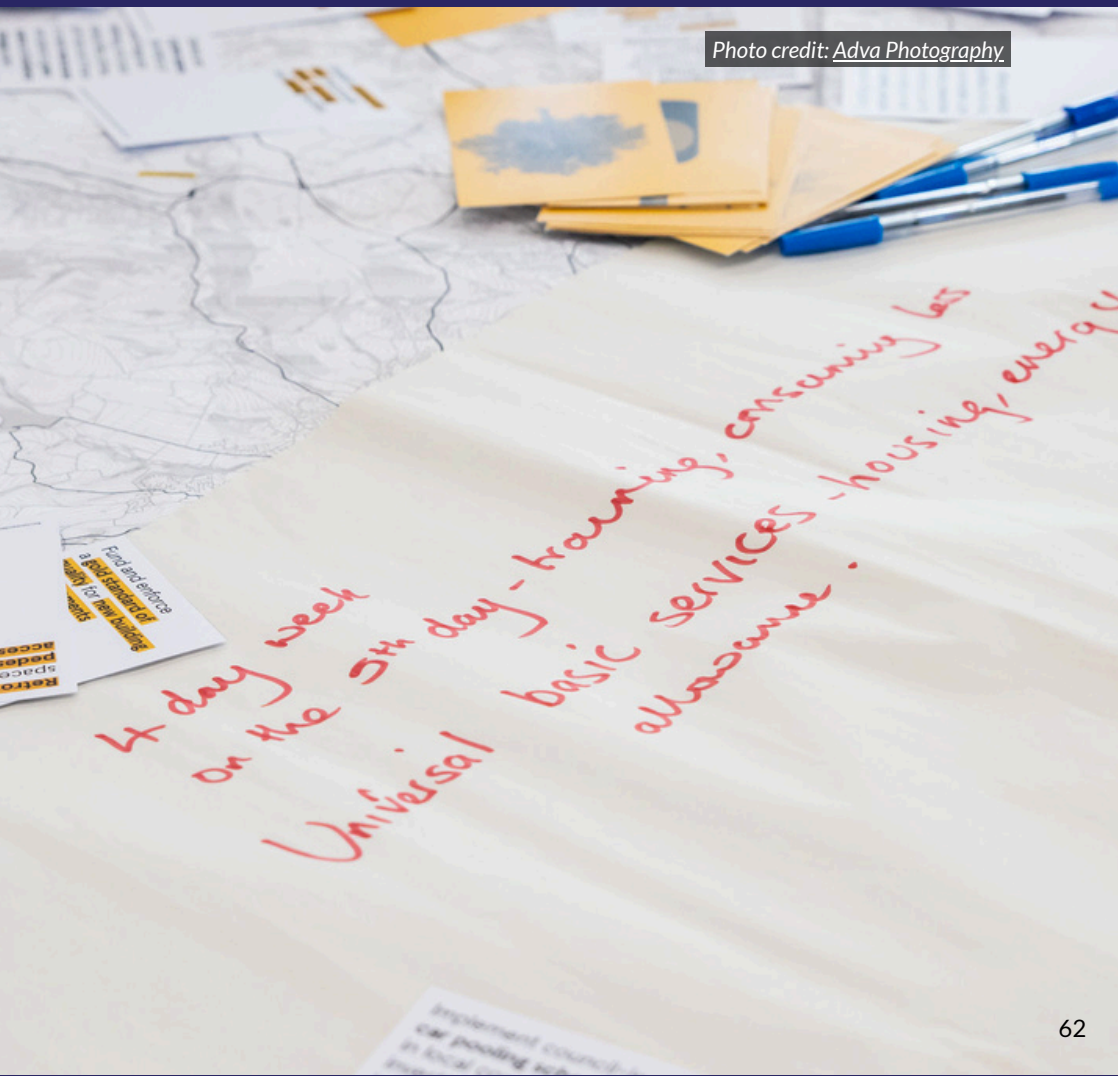
We appointed a new Finance Co-ordinator to lead on improving financial systems and raising the quality of financial information used for decision-making.

We developed an internal finance training programme, taking members through all aspects of financial management at Opus from project

budgets through to statutory accounts.

We made progress on our aims of raising staff salaries towards a Yorkshire median (target: £32-38k per annum, current full-time Opus salary: £30,050) and building our reserves to three months' operating costs (target: £175-200k, reserves at end of 2025: £64k).

Photo credit: [Adva Photography](#)



COMMUNICATIONS



One of the biggest tensions we've been holding in our communications work in 2025 is around our use of social media platforms. On the one hand, platforms like X and Facebook are engaged in deeply unethical practices, and are owned by fascist billionaires who use them to proliferate the spread of far-right ideologies. On the other hand, because many of these platforms are used by so many people, they are difficult even for billionaires to control and monitor – so they are paradoxically often the only spaces where voices of resistance and hope can be heard.

In response to this tension, we published [a piece in Now Then](#) that aimed to make our approach and our thinking on the topic more visible to our audiences. This

will always be an iterative process of consistently assessing and responding to the context we're working in, which will continue into 2026.

Another really key tension we are holding is within our internal comms process – the tension between an increasing need for effective internal communications and the risk of information overload. Communication between workflows across the organisation has never felt so important as it does now, as Opus grows and changes. Going into 2026, we'll be revisiting some of our internal comms processes, to consider how we might do this more effectively, and working alongside our new Operations Coordinator, Lucy, to build new processes that aid communications.

Our updates from 2025:

We published an [article](#) sharing our thinking on our use of social media platforms at Opus, and received lots of positive feedback and engagement from audiences and from other organisations.

As always, we supported Festival of Debate with lots of communications work. This year, we got [coverage from the BBC](#) for the first time, as well as from [The Star](#), [Our Favourite Places](#), and a short TV interview on Freeview Channel 7.

Over the period of this year's festival we grew the Festival of Debate mailing list from 1,925 to 3,415 subscribers.

We've posted much more on the [Opus blog](#) this year – lots of interesting

behind-the-scenes titbits that help to visibilise the work we do.

As part of this, we started a project publishing generative interviews to the Opus website to help articulate and visibilise some of the work we're doing on values and ways of working – you can read the first in the series [in this section](#).

We began a review process for our internal communication processes, in particular the Opus Bulletin, a fortnightly newsletter that goes out to all Opus members.

We moved the [Now Then newsletter](#) over to Action Network, in line with the rest of our newsletters. This has allowed us greater flexibility, and allowed us to manage all of our mailing lists in the same place for the first time.

6,500+

mailing list subscribers

55,000+

followers across social media platforms

70+

newsletters sent out in 2025

22

internal bulletins sent out to Opus members



HOW WE WORK TOGETHER

This year, we launched a brand new series aimed at increasing transparency about the work and learning we're doing internally.

In this section you can read the first in this series, in which we spoke to Bashkim Muca about his work exploring where Opus keeps its money, balancing ethics, risk, and the context we're working in.

WHERE SHOULD SYSTEMS CHANGE ORGANISATIONS KEEP THEIR MONEY?



At Opus, we're in the process of changing where we keep our company savings to better balance ethics, risk and the current financial landscape. Team member Sam Gregory spoke to colleague Bashkim Muca about the thinking behind the switch, and what learning we can offer to other organisations dedicated to social change.

Opus is a worker-owned social enterprise based in Sheffield, England, that explores systems change projects that benefit people and planet. Like similar organisations, we've struggled with the dilemma of who we bank with: how can we avoid inadvertently investing in things that create the very problems we're trying to tackle through our work?

been exploring whether we can bank in a way that's more ethical, while also generating additional interest to contribute towards our work on systems change. He sat down with colleague Sam Gregory for a generative conversation that we hope will generate learning for other organisations grappling with the same problem.

New team member Bashkim Muca has

How would you describe the problem you were trying to solve?

The problem I was trying to solve is that often with NGOs, charities, and companies that do really positive work, there's an interesting correlation with the banks they use and the interest rates those banks provide. Really harmful investments return a lot more money than really positive investments. Weapons, oil... these have huge returns. In standard financing, companies that do both – ethical and unethical investments – are actually considered to be more diversified and less risky to invest in.

A lot of charities use what are considered to be 'ethical' banks, but the interest rates are very low. The tough thing to balance is getting nice interest rates, so we get extra money to continue the positive systems change work, but not picking something that doesn't align with the ethos of Opus. Because then it'd be pointless. Who you interact with, who you procure from – that's a voice in itself.

Some organisations with big endowments end up investing in things that are causing the very problems the organisation exists to solve.

Is any bank really ethical? The line that everyone draws is so different. Even Triodos's Global Equities Impact Fund used to invest in Nike, which has a poor record on worker exploitation, and currently invests in AstraZeneca (which has continued to do business in Russia). You can't avoid it in full unless we take all the cash out and put it under a mattress.

Tell us a bit about the process you went through.

I essentially did a detailed six-pager, summarising our savings account options. At the moment we use Co-op's Instant Access, with 1.25% interest, which is really bad. But Co-op are actually quite ethical. There's different ways of measuring the ethics of a bank, and we've ended up using three



different websites: the Good Shopping Guide, the Ethical Consumer Guide, and Bank Green. The latter aren't incredibly well known, but they look at the sustainability of banks – what's their stance on net-zero? What do they invest in?

There's a bank called Charity Bank which is actually the first EU B Corp bank, meaning they work in service of people, planet and profit, all together. Pretty good interest rates as well, but the issue is they're quite small. There's no internet banking, and as an organisation that sort of stuff can be quite prohibiting, especially for capacity.

I ended up looking at quite a lot of banks: Nationwide, Triodos, Charity Bank, Co-op. There was a lot of background research, calling all the banks – 'Do you do this?' It seems that a lot of the 'ethical' banks are having capacity issues when it comes to business savings.

That's interesting. There's a demand for it?

Yeah, exactly. I think Nationwide have been unable to open their business savings accounts to new customers since 2021. These were all things I was trying to make myself aware of before I proposed something. It was essentially a lot of analysis using metrics to gauge whether these banks are ethical or not, and then making certain value judgments as well as to what I feel Opus would be okay with.

What did you decide on in the end?

There's a difference in the risk appetite organisations like ours should take on compared to larger organisations. The problem is, if we put our savings in one bank, it's quite risky. If that bank were to collapse, you're FSCS guaranteed up to £85,000. If we put anything more than £85,000 in one bank, we'd only get £85,000 back. It's about prepping for a worst case scenario.

The decision I ended up recommending in the proposal uses an organisation called Flagstone. It's essentially a fin-tech organisation which is like a middleman between us and about 60 banks, and there's actually a few B Corp banks on there. I think about 12 of them are 'ethical' by the metrics we're using. Flagstone acts as a platform through which you can spread your savings across multiple different banks, but with an interface that makes this easy to do without opening up dozens of different accounts manually.

The banks they have on their site offer better interest rates than you can actually find on the banks' own websites, as it's a good way for the banks to get liquid cash quite quick. They can offer higher interest rates than normal without the much longer process of having to open official accounts. Banks often need liquid cash to meet short-term financial obligations so it's beneficial for both parties. Flagstone provides all the

'know your customer' and 'due diligence' work prior, so the banks also save a lot of time, as do we.

You put your money into this wallet, but unfortunately the wallet Flagstone has is a holding account that goes through HSBC. Unfortunately for us, HSBC would never be on the list of banks we want to use. They're Europe's second biggest investor in fossil fuels, so definitely not on our tick list. So it actually needs to leave the holding account as quickly as possible so HSBC doesn't have access to that on their balance sheets, which might allow them to reinvest our money into things we wouldn't approve of. We need to prep what banks we want to use, where we're going to put our money, and then once we get the account open, instantly put it in.

Opus is a democratic worker-owned company, so what I've come up with so far is just a proposal. I'm going to put it to the rest of the team at an upcoming board meeting, but I'm hopeful that they'll see that this is the right way to go – balancing our need to generate more income with our ethical aims as an organisation.

So with Flagstone we spread the savings across different 'ethical' banks?

Yes, exactly. We're able to keep that FSCS protection. If we split all our savings across six or seven different banks that we consider 'ethical', and all of them collapsed at the same time, we'd get our

money back. It's being clever with the risk and the opportunity we've got, and knowing how much we can put in each account. How can we best balance the higher interest rates to help with systems change work while also being ethical? The only hiccup in that entire process is the HSBC holding account – damn.

What's the best thing that could happen as a result of this work?

Internally, I'm hoping there's quite a large discussion that stems from this as a case study about ethics and due diligence in our entire procurement process: what we're okay with, essentially. It's about leading by example.

I'm hoping that externalising this, through this interview, shows that Opus as an organisation wants to be transparent. And also that in a world that's incredibly unethical, you can actually make adjustments and still get some benefit. It's a bit of a balancing act. That's the overarching goal: to show people it's possible.

This article is the first in our series looking at some of our internal processes and 'learning out loud' about what we're working on. It can also be found in full on the Opus blog.

If you want to be the first to know when we publish future articles, sign up to our mailing list.



2026 & BEYOND

As we close out the year, we're also looking ahead to 2026.

In this section, we'll hear from Opus's Operations Team to find out what's on the horizon for the organisation.

A MESSAGE FROM THE OPS TEAM



Photo credit: Tim Feben

What we do at Opus regularly changes in response to our internal and external context. We're also in the middle of a careful evaluation of how we organise our work internally, and we expect to implement changes at project and operational level in 2026. So instead of presenting a shiny-but-mostly-fictitious timeline of what the next 12 months holds, we want to finish this report with insights into our direction of travel, and what holds us together, for 2026 and beyond.

In 2025 we held a series of connected surveys, workshops and in-depth R&D work with our members. This clarified our understanding of the work that Opus is uniquely positioned, and motivated, to do and the resources (time, money and imagination) needed to keep going. Acknowledging that Opus is made up of a wide range of projects, with different

scopes, audiences, and objectives, we tried to find a coherent sense of what unifies them, what difference they make to people in Sheffield and beyond, and how to nurture them in the coming years. We also moved into a new office at The Circle and we developed new capacities, approaches and procedures that are better suited to our size and the scope of our ambitions – in particular around finance, wellbeing and operations.

In parallel to all of this, after months of planning, an internal working group at Opus designed and hosted a successful Directors election which saw us vote in three new Working Directors and one new Holistic Director. So at the end of 2025, Opus had nine Directors. Thank you to everyone at Opus who is holding those responsibilities on behalf of the whole, and to everyone who designed and hosted the election process itself.

All of the above is the opposite of neat – it's knotty, it can be emotionally taxing and it rarely offers any clean resolution. It feels important to be honest about where we're at as an organisation, so that anybody reading this report understands that we haven't – and don't

think that we have – 'solved' it. Because 'it' is probably too elusive to be solved.

Some key questions we're holding at this juncture include:

- How do we mobilise and weave together the infrastructures, platforms and capabilities that Opus has grown since 2008 for greater and more intentional impact towards transitions?
- How can we balance financial sustainability against continuing to be bold, aspirational and mission-driven?
- What practices do we want to embed that deepen learning, centre wellbeing and prioritise meaningful relationships?

The act of balancing care for the individual with care for the organisation and care for the mission will always need our attention, and it will often ask us – paradoxically, in the face of such urgency – to slow down. This could be a theme for us for 2026 – embracing this urgency/slowness paradox (and many other paradoxes), while continuing to bring people and groups together to make sense of the city and the world, share stories of resistance and hope, and demonstrate possible pathways to liveable futures.

Opus Operations team

Photo credit: Rachel Rae



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

That's a wrap for our 2025 Annual Report!

Above all, we want to say a massive thank you to all of the people and organisations we've worked alongside and learned from this year.

See you in 2026!

AESSEAL African Voices Platform Alpaca Festival Arts Catalyst
ArtWorks Basic Income Research Group Business in the Community
Citizen Network Climate2025 Compass Compassionate Sheffield
Cooperation Sheffield Dark Matter Labs Data for Action Don Catchment
Rivers Trust Esmée Fairbairn Foundation Flourish Economics Grantham
Centre for Sustainable Futures Gut Leve Hive IT Hope for the Future
Joseph Rowntree Foundation Key Fund Lankelly Chase Foundation
Lawyers for Nature Learn Sheffield Media North Necessity Northend
Print Off The Shelf Festival of Words Purple Shoots Regen Melbourne
Regional Futures ROAR Sensoria Festival Sheaf and Porter Rivers Trust
Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust Sheffield City Council Sheffield
Community Land Trust Sheffield Credit Union Sheffield Hallam University
Sheffield Health and Social Care Sheffield Museums Sheffield Social
Enterprise Network Sheffield Transformed South Yorkshire Climate Alliance
South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group South Yorkshire
Sustainability Centre South Yorkshire's Community Foundation The Green
Estate Under The Stars University of Sheffield Utopia Theatre Voluntary
Action Sheffield AESSEAL African Voices Platform Alpaca Festival Arts
Catalyst ArtWorks Basic Income Research Group Business in the
Community Citizen Network Climate2025 Compass Compassionate
Sheffield Cooperation Sheffield Dark Matter Labs Data for Action Don
Catchment Rivers Trust Esmée Fairbairn Foundation Flourish Economics
Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures Gut Level Hive IT Hope for the
Future Joseph Rowntree Foundation Key Fund Lankelly Chase Foundation
Lawyers for Nature Learn Sheffield Media North Necessity Northend
Print Off The Shelf Festival of Words Purple Shoots Regen Melbourne
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Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust Sheffield City Council Sheffield
Community Land Trust Sheffield Credit Union Sheffield Hallam University

