

The Red Brick Building: What's at Stake in the Next Two Weeks

The future of the Red Brick Building will be decided within the next two weeks. An independent financial review is under way, alongside a series of critical meetings at Somerset Council that will determine whether this long-standing community asset can continue to operate, or whether it will be forced to close.

Until recently we have been bound by confidentiality obligations under the Towns Fund Grant agreement and were therefore unable to speak publicly about events relating to the project. We also wanted to ensure the organisation was not jeopardised whilst we worked to resolve the issues.

However, last week, a Somerset County Councillor visited the Red Brick Building to meet staff and tenants—many of whom now face the loss of their workspaces, roles, and livelihoods.

That visit prompted the need to set out, clearly and publicly, how we arrived at this point.

Given the scale of misinformation and the complexity of events, we believe it is essential to explain what has happened, what is at risk, and what the closure of the Red Brick Building would mean for Glastonbury.

Background: A Thriving Community Hub

Before the Towns Deal-funded Life Factory project began to impact our organisation, the Red Brick Building was a busy, stable, and successful community centre. We delivered:

- Community outreach programmes
- An active community garden
- Community-led initiatives, workshops, and courses
- Affordable desk and office space for local businesses
- Artisan and maker spaces
- Music and arts events as the largest venue of its kind locally
- A popular café/restaurant
- Work experience placements for students and volunteer opportunities
- A wide range of grassroots activities led by volunteers and local partners

The centre was vibrant, financially stable, and operating confidently within its organisational capacity.

The Life Factory Project: A Separate Project

The Life Factory project was a Towns Deal initiative focused on the second phase of the building. It was developed and delivered by a separate project team, with its own structure, budget, and operational focus. While the Life Factory team initially operated independently, they later rejoined the Red Brick Building in order to access Towns Deal funding that required formal governance.

It is important to be absolutely clear: the only shared element between the Life Factory project and the existing Red Brick Building community centre was a common board of directors. Day-to-day operations, staffing, and core community activity at Red Brick were otherwise distinct.

The Board acknowledges that oversight and decision-making were not as strong as they should have been right from the start and takes responsibility for governance decisions. Directors raised concerns early about their capacity to manage a project of this scale and complexity and requested support when Mendip District Council was involved. Subsequent audit reporting has also highlighted significant weaknesses in Somerset Council's oversight as the accountable body.

The pressures created by the Life Factory project were huge. This was particularly evident during the prolonged and abrupt pause in funding while we conducted our own internal investigations and an external audit took place. Responsibility for this fell heavily on the Red Brick organisation. Staff time, board capacity, financial oversight, and operational resources were repeatedly diverted to support a project that was never designed or resourced to be absorbed into the core organisation.

When Life Factory funding was paused, Red Brick had no choice but to use all available reserves to pay Life Factory staff wages and contractors for work already completed, based on assurances that funding would resume. As a Community Benefit Society and responsible employer, the organisation had legal and ethical obligations to meet these commitments. The financial consequences of this were not adequately acknowledged or mitigated by Somerset Council.

There is now a very strong likelihood that the fallout from the Life Factory Towns Deal project will now lead to the closure of both the long-standing Red Brick Building community centre and the Glastonbury Food and Regenerative Farming Project.

Impact on the Organisation

Since the Life Factory project began, it has placed sustained strain on the Red Brick Building in the following ways:

- **Operational resources:** A live construction site made it difficult for staff and tenants to work safely and for the organisation to sustain income-generating activity.
- **Staff capacity:** A small, largely part-time staff team was stretched far beyond contractual roles while dealing with ongoing fallout from Life Factory operations.
- **Board capacity:** Directors were required to navigate a highly complex grant programme well outside their usual remit, with minimal practical external support despite repeated requests for specific training and guidance.
- **Finances:** During an extended pause in funding—initially communicated as lasting three months—Red Brick exhausted all reserves to cover Life Factory wages and contractor costs, leaving the organisation financially exposed as the pause continued.
- **Tenant stability:** Disruption caused by the Life Factory project contributed directly to the loss of our anchor tenant, The Old Tannery.

Clawback Request and Escalating Financial Risk

Somerset Council, as the accountable body for the Towns Deal funding, has now issued a clawback request for the full grant amount. This request also includes funding linked to the Glastonbury Regenerative Food and Farming Project, which is a project currently thriving and delivering its agreed outcomes.

The clawback request, combined with sustained negative and often inaccurate media coverage, has had a devastating effect. We have lost key tenants, cancelled bookings, and been forced to halt future plans—further reducing income at a time when staff are already under extreme pressure.

Red Brick does not have the financial capacity to repay this sum. The Board is therefore preparing for the very real possibility of insolvency. An emergency independent financial assessment is currently under way.

What Closure Would Mean

The closure of the Red Brick Building would displace:

- Many local small businesses and social enterprises
- Staff and volunteers
- Long term regular hirers' who rely on the space to run their livelihoods
- Community members supported through our ongoing initiatives, including:

- Weekly community support sessions in collaboration with Glastonbury Mental Health Network
- The community garden supporting people experiencing mental health challenges, homelessness, and isolation
- Local musicians and students that use the event space at low or no cost
- Our flagship Morlands and Baily's heritage project, bringing former workers together for a monthly reunion, preserving local history and engaging schools

As one tenant explained:

"The Red Brick wasn't just a venue for me — it became integral to my livelihood and my creative practice. I can't simply pick up what I do and move it elsewhere. This building was right structurally, creatively, and in terms of trust. Losing it means losing a way of working that can't easily be replaced."

The Human Cost

Our small staff team has worked under immense and prolonged strain. Alongside operational pressures, staff and volunteers have been deeply affected by rumours and misinformation circulating publicly.

A minority of voices, sadly including some individuals in community-facing roles, have repeatedly criticised and undermined the organisation using hearsay or unsubstantiated claims, often failing to distinguish between the Life Factory project and the long-standing Red Brick community centre. Throughout this period, the Board and staff have had to remain as professional as possible and have not engaged publicly or defensively on social media, despite the personal and emotional toll.

There have also been rumours circulating regarding financial impropriety. We can confirm that no staff, trustees, or directors of Red Brick have been approached about any investigation into this.

As one long-term hirer described:

"The people who stayed — staff, tenants, hirers, small businesses — are not the villains in this story. Most of the current team and board have only been in place in recent years, quietly trying to salvage what they could. None of us caused this, yet we are the ones who have lost the most."

This has caused significant distress, eroded morale, and damaged reputation at a time when the organisation most needed community support.

What the Community Has Achieved

Despite these challenges, the Red Brick community has continued to deliver an extraordinary range of activity over recent years, including:

- An RHS award-winning community garden praised for inclusivity and outreach
- Heritage focus, outreach and activities through the Morlands and Baily's project
- Some fabulous and wide-ranging music, cultural, and arts events in the area's largest venue
- Youth work in partnership with the YMCA, youth music, heritage events and college work experience placements
- Mental health and community regular drop-in sessions in collaboration with Glastonbury Mental Health Network
- Many, many hours of committed volunteer time that has gone into the Farm project.
- An active Jazz scene and Local musicians, young DJ's, artists and student supported
- Exhibitions, markets, and volunteering opportunities
- Low cost work spaces fostering networking a support for Local Business
- Creative Spaces for Artisans and low cost community space for regular classes, workshops and courses

"At its height, the Red Brick was genuinely multi-functional — a place where culture, creativity, conversation, and community overlapped. People who might never otherwise have crossed paths came, stayed, and belonged. That period matters, because it shows what the Red Brick was capable of." Long term user of the building

These achievements reflect a community hub that prioritised people and purpose over polish, while consistently delivering far beyond its size and resources. To see this great effort and investment go by the wayside is truly devastating.

Our Current Position

We are now at a critical point. Our reputation has been seriously damaged—not only by the situation itself but by inaccurate or misleading narratives circulating publicly. In some cases, Somerset Council's own communications have contributed to confusion and fear, leaving staff and tenants feeling unprotected and misrepresented.

While some committed tenants remain, others have left following premature and unauthorised rumours of insolvency. Income has dropped sharply. We are no longer able to

take on new bookings or re-let the café/restaurant space—both of which could have supported cashflow and stabilisation.

It is important to state clearly that the Towns Deal, Life Factory project did not merely stretch the organisation—it exhausted it.

A Final Opportunity

Despite everything, Red Brick developed a fully costed recovery plan, including an emergency funding package that was approved and would have enabled the existing community centre to stabilise, rebuild, and begin repaying debts that accrued as a direct result of pressures arising from the Life Factory project.

Time is now critical. Our final hope rests on Somerset Council choosing to act in the best interests of the community by:

- Not enforcing a full clawback on a project that should not have proceeded without stronger due diligence, impact assessment, and oversight.
- Recognising the distinction between the failed Life Factory project and the long-standing Red Brick community centre.
- Supporting, rather than dismantling, a community asset that has served Glastonbury for over a decade and cause longer term cultural and social loss.
- Work to secure the farmland for GFRFC, given it is an asset of Red Brick and would be sold to the benefit of creditors in the case of insolvency - mainly Somerset County Council. Due to the cessation of the funding for the farm, the staff team are to lose their jobs at the end of December without significant intervention to both secure the land and re-start funding, with Bridie's CIC if not Red Brick.

As one long-standing tenant put it:

“This isn’t about blaming those who stayed and tried to hold things together. It’s about recognising who paid the price when governance failed, communication broke down, and oversight didn’t intervene in time. The damage has been done quietly, to livelihoods and to a community.”

We welcome Glastonbury Town Council’s recent motion to apply for Asset of Community Value status for both the Red Brick Building and Bridie’s Farm (the Glastonbury Food and Regenerative Farming Centre). This offers a potential future route to safeguarding these assets.

However, it would be a profound waste of public and community resources if the community were now forced to ‘buy back’ assets it has already invested in and built over many years, particularly at a point where both projects are now likely to be lost.