CITREY CIC · DISCUSSION PAPER · SEPTEMBER 2026

Crisis Beneath Success

A Living City Diagnostic Discussion Paper
Overview



Citrey CIC

In partnership with:

Adaptiv

Mojobouji

Derby and the Crisis Beneath its Success

Derby has the capacity to create wealth, yet too many of its people are living without the security that wealth should help make possible. The strain shows up in children growing up in poverty, families waiting for education and care plans, and empty premises on the city's streets.[1,2,3]

Strength and strain in the same city

- 22,000 manufacturing jobs in Derby in 2024. Manufacturing accounted for 15.9% of employee jobs, more than twice Great Britain's 7.3%.[4]
- 15,300 children aged 0-15 lived in relative low-income families in 2024/25 - 27.9% of Derby's children in that age group.[1]
- Around one in five ground-floor units in the surveyed city-centre Core Area stood vacant in July 2025. The 19% rate excludes Derbion and had improved from 26% in 2022.[3]

SOURCES
1 Derby City Council • Key statistics • DWP low-income families 2024/25
2 Derby City Council • Annual Performance Results 2024/25
3 Derby City Council • Authority Monitoring Report 2025 • City Centre Health
4 ONS Nomis • Derby labour market profile • ASHE 2025 and BRES 2024

Our diagnosis

The crisis is already present in household hardship, delayed support and struggling streets. Its longer-term danger is that these pressures weaken the relationships, businesses and opportunities Derby needs to renew itself.

Our working diagnosis is that Derby's economic strengths are unevenly connected to everyday prosperity. We propose that access to opportunity, the quality of civic relationships and the responsiveness of institutions help explain that gap, alongside national policy and wider economic conditions.

This paper sets out the evidence and the connections we believe deserve investigation. We invite you to test that explanation against your own experience.

What is stopping Derby's strengths from becoming a better everyday life for more of its people?



A shared enquiry into Derby's future

This paper brings street-level experience, cultural practice and systemic analysis into one conversation. The city centre is a meeting point for Derby's wider life: work, commerce, culture, public services and community. Understanding its condition means examining the relationships and institutions around it, and people's ability to participate.

The work already under way

Citrey opened at 6a Sadler Gate on 28 June 2026. Since opening, more than 600 people have crossed the threshold. Debates and conversations with residents, businesses and civic organisations have put the city's future into public discussion.

Ten teenagers took part in Teenage Voices of the Summer. Their priorities included paid opportunities, advocacy and safe, affordable places to meet. Those are practical tests of whether a city is making room for its next generation.

The experience we bring

Lauren Thompson: Citrey founder and founder of Roots & Futures, bringing place development and championing deliberative democracy and direct engagement with people using the high street.

Amit Zala: founder of Adaptiv, bringing organisational and systemic advisory experience, The Living City framework and the Ghost Town Paradox paper.

Devon Daley: founder of Mojobouji and Destination Derbados, bringing decades of experience in media, cultural programming, events and audience building across Derby and the UK.



The Living City

Inspired by the Eiffel Tower. Rooted in Derby.
The Eiffel Tower turned engineering ambition into a symbol people could experience and identify with. Its future was secured through new uses, particularly wireless communication. This is a great reminder that enduring value depends on adaptation and renewal.

That story resonates with Derby. As a city shaped by engineering and industry, Derby faces the challenge of turning its productive strengths into a shared sense of pride, ownership, opportunity and belonging.

Our image combines a tower's interdependent structure with a tree's living roots and capacity to grow.
Two root systems - community and institutions - support the whole civic system.

A question evoked by the framework: **how can Derby's industrial and civic strengths become lasting prosperity that more of its people can share?**



The Living City™

What turns a city's strength into a good life for its people?

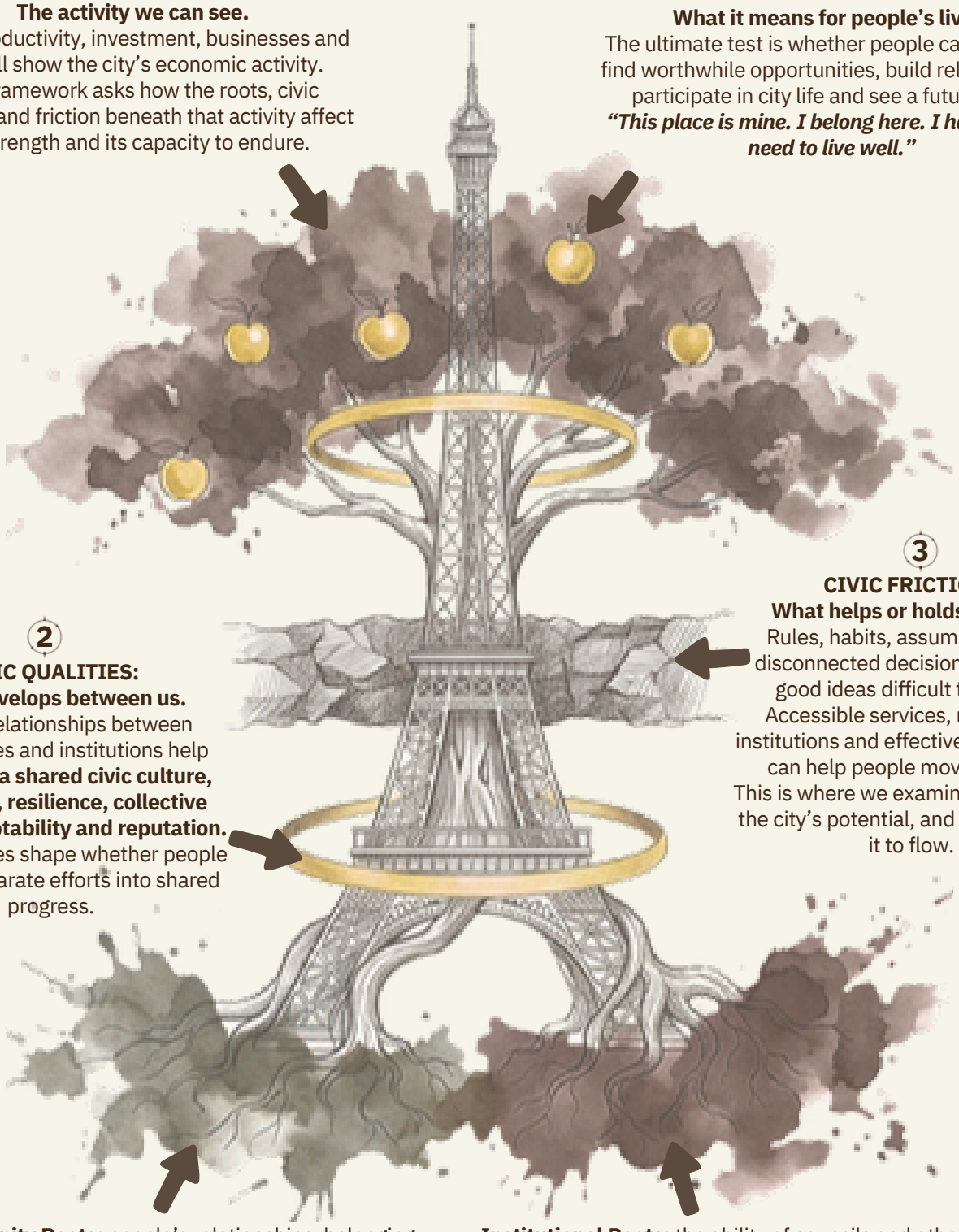
A city's prosperity grows through the relationship between its people and its institutions. The Living City framework explores how those foundations shape the city's ability to work together, overcome barriers and turn economic activity into lasting wellbeing. ***Read the tower from the roots upwards.***

4

CIVIC CANOPY:
The activity we can see.
Jobs, productivity, investment, businesses and footfall show the city's economic activity. The framework asks how the roots, civic qualities and friction beneath that activity affect its strength and its capacity to endure.

5

CIVIC PROSPERITY:
What it means for people's lives.
The ultimate test is whether people can live well: find worthwhile opportunities, build relationships, participate in city life and see a future here.
"This place is mine. I belong here. I have what I need to live well."



3

CIVIC FRICTION:
What helps or holds us back.
Rules, habits, assumptions and disconnected decisions can make good ideas difficult to realise. Accessible services, responsive institutions and effective partnerships can help people move forward. This is where we examine what blocks the city's potential, and what enables it to flow.

2

CIVIC QUALITIES:
What develops between us.
Healthy relationships between communities and institutions help build **trust, a shared civic culture, coherence, resilience, collective energy, adaptability and reputation.** These qualities shape whether people can turn separate efforts into shared progress.

Community Roots: people's relationships, belonging, skills, culture and willingness to contribute.

Institutional Roots: the ability of councils and other civic institutions to listen, coordinate, deliver and learn.

1 **CIVIC ROOTS: The foundations of city life.** Together, these roots influence what a city can achieve, and whose needs it can respond to.

Derby as a Living City: The capacity beneath the headlines

Derby's future depends on what its people and institutions can make possible together. The Living City framework helps us examine that capacity: who can contribute, how relationships work and where worthwhile activity gets stuck.

Civic roots: who can help shape the city?
Civic energy is visible in people opening spaces, organising events, building businesses, caring for others and joining public debate. Citrey's 600-plus visitors provide one recent example. Institutional capability is visible in the delivery of Market Hall and Vaillant Live.[5]

The question is how these strengths connect. People need accessible places, useful relationships and dependable support to turn their contribution into something that lasts.

Who can turn an idea or ambition into a real opportunity in Derby-and who finds that route out of reach?

Civic qualities: can separate strengths become collective strength?
Trust, civic culture, coherence, resilience, collective energy, adaptability and reputation develop through what people experience together. They become visible when commitments are kept, disagreement is heard, organisations coordinate and learning changes practice.

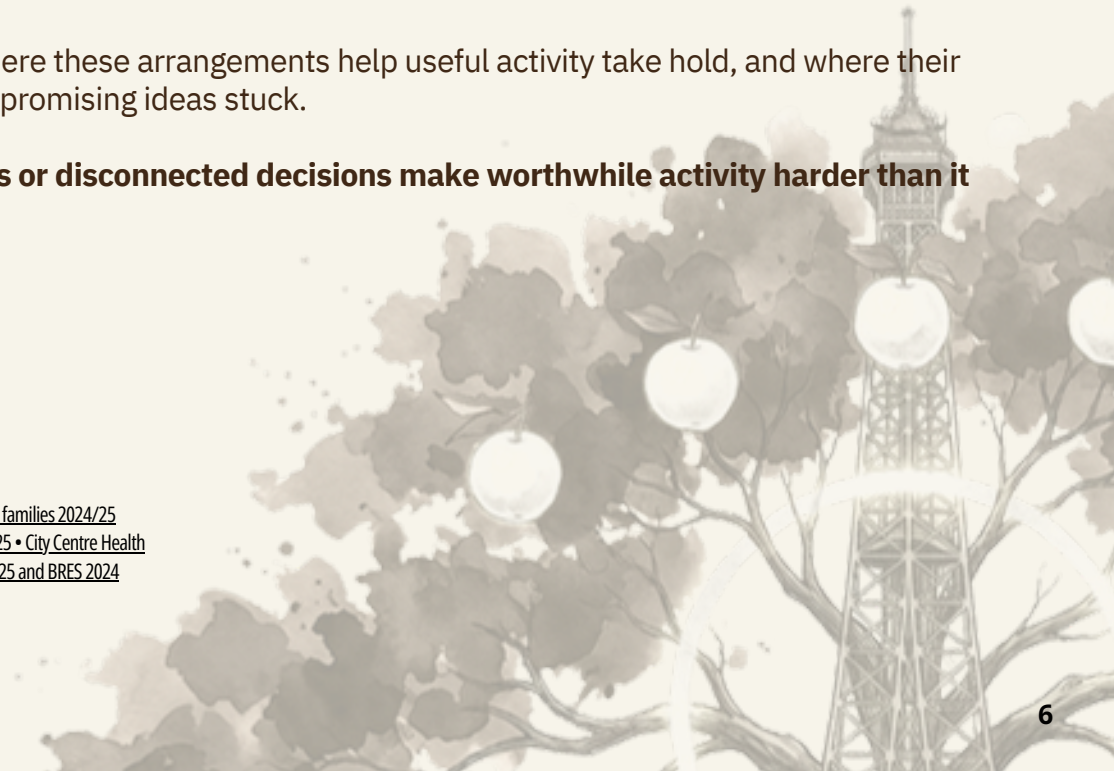
Our proposition is that the reach and durability of these relationships influence how widely Derby's strengths benefit its people.

What would help successful pockets of cooperation become a dependable experience across the city?

Civic friction: what makes worthwhile activity difficult?
A community meeting place, an independent shop and a major commercial venue have different costs, income streams and public benefits. Funding requirements, property terms and decision processes need to recognise those differences.

We propose examining where these arrangements help useful activity take hold, and where their combined demands leave promising ideas stuck.

Which rules, assumptions or disconnected decisions make worthwhile activity harder than it needs to be?



SOURCES
1 Derby City Council • Key statistics • DWP low-income families 2024/25
3 Derby City Council • Authority Monitoring Report 2025 • City Centre Health
4 ONS Nomis • Derby labour market profile • ASHE 2025 and BRES 2024
5 Derby City Council • Annual Report 2024/25

Derby as a Living City: What does success make possible?

Civic canopy: productive strength and uneven local vitality
Derby had 22,000 manufacturing jobs in 2024. Its economic capability is substantial. Yet 19% of surveyed ground-floor units in the city-centre Core Area were vacant in July 2025, excluding Derbion-even after improvement from 26% in 2022.[4,3]

Successful destinations and struggling streets coexist. That makes the connections between them important: routes, opening hours, programming, affordability and the experience of spending time in the centre.

What would help activity at Derbion, Pride Park and cultural venues support more of the surrounding streets and independent businesses?

Civic prosperity: who can build a good life here?
More than a quarter of Derby's children aged 0-15 lived in relative low-income families in 2024/25.[1] That makes the question of who benefits from economic success urgent.

Prosperity becomes tangible when people can afford everyday life, find worthwhile opportunities, build relationships and participate in the city. Culture and shared places matter here as settings for belonging, expression and connection.

What would make a good life in Derby more accessible across neighbourhoods and generations?

Today's outcomes become tomorrow's foundations
The framework brings us back to the roots. Security, health and opportunity can give people more capacity to contribute, support others and build a future here. Persistent hardship can restrict that capacity.

Our concern is that these pressures may reinforce one another: fewer opportunities to participate, weaker connections and less capacity to create the next generation of opportunity. This is a proposition to investigate through Derby's experience.

Is Derby renewing the conditions on which its future success depends?



SOURCES
1 Derby City Council • Key statistics • DWP low-income families 2024/25
3 Derby City Council • Authority Monitoring Report 2025 • City Centre Health
4 ONS Nomis • Derby labour market profile • ASHE 2025 and BRES 2024
5 Derby City Council • Annual Report 2024/25

From diagnosis to ideas for action.

Derby has substantial strengths to build on. This Overview asks how those strengths can create a better everyday life for more of its people-and what may be preventing that from happening.

The accompanying **Detailed Diagnosis** examines each part of the Living City framework through public evidence, lived experience and working hypotheses, with linked sources and questions for further investigation.

We invite you to **help us sharpen this diagnosis:**

- Tell us what we have missed, including work that is already making a difference.
- Challenge the explanations. Share evidence of where they fit and where they fail.
- Identify the barriers that deserve investigation, and who needs to be involved.

From diagnosis to ideas for action:
On Wednesday 30 September 2026, we will come together at Citrey, 6a Sadler Gate, to discuss the diagnosis and share emerging ideas for action.

These will explore opportunities for civic participation, youth employment and enterprise, intergenerational support, and spaces that bring people together. We will also discuss the partnerships, feasibility work and funding needed to develop promising ideas.

The invitation is to help shape those ideas: what deserves priority, what needs testing, and who could contribute experience, relationships or resources to take it forward?

To share your views or reserve a place, contact **hello@citrey.co.uk**. Space is limited.

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