



From neighbours to neighbourhood

Learning on how to boost pride in place

Executive Summary

November 2022

Introduction

The UK Government's 2022 white paper *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* sets out a policy programme to increase opportunity and economic growth by addressing geographic inequality. Framed in this way, it's clear that the concept of place is central to levelling up. In line with this, one of the key aims is to "restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging", with the goal of raising pride in place in every area of the UK by 2030.

At The National Lottery Community Fund, in a typical year 42% of our grant holders report that people have more local pride and belonging because of the services or activities we support them to deliver. This means that, as well as our projects being key contributors to local pride, our work and the difference our funding makes can contribute to a better understanding of what pride in place means and how to improve it.

In this report, we share examples and key learning from our work to show how local pride can be practically understood, and how it can be lifted and reinforced through practical action.

How to boost pride in place

1. Empower people to design and shape where they live

Community empowerment – control of local assets and decisions about an area – is a key factor in building pride in place. Our work helps facilitate this, with 16% of our grant holders reporting that their work means people feel more ownership and control over local decisions.

- Involvement must be meaningful – give the community real power to make decisions and allocate funding.
- One way to do this is to have organisations pitch their ideas to the community, who then vote for which

projects get funded. Be careful with this approach, as it may be unreasonable to expect members of the public to debate the merits of very different services, or to pit groups providing equally vital services against one another.

- Proactively include communities that don't usually have a say or feel excluded. This may mean diversifying your own team, taking time to build stronger relationships, or offering compensation for people's time.
- Time spent strengthening relationships and building trust is never wasted. Support people to debate and disagree constructively. Neutral venues and independent facilitation can help differing views be heard and discussed positively.
- Co-designed services and activities bring many benefits, but people don't always have solutions to the issues affecting them. Blend lived and professional experience, and be open and transparent about what is and isn't possible.

2. Improve and safeguard local amenities

Amenities are the physical cornerstones of a community. They provide essential services from places for people to connect, to food and transport. Where local amenities don't meet a community's needs, there is a risk of entrenching inequality through rising prices and – in some cases – falling standards. This can mean the difference between residents feeling proud of the area or feeling that it has been left behind.

- Community ownership offers a solution here, but make sure it doesn't end up making buildings and land into liabilities for the community. Due diligence, for example cost-of-running estimates based on structural surveys and realistic income projections, is vital. A paid project manager can help with this.

- Reinvesting any profits from community-run amenities into local good causes can help people see the cause and effect of their time and hard work, encouraging more community involvement.
- Grants and guidance to make community venues more energy efficient can be vital in terms of keeping them affordable to run, and can also free up money to invest in involving a wider breadth of community members.
- Community-run amenities often have a social mission, which can be key in attracting volunteers and support. The Plunkett Foundation found that few community shops generate a profit of more than £10,000, but the commitment of local volunteers contributes to their “remarkable durability”.

3. Make the local environment feel safe and look attractive

How an area looks and feels is central to people feeling proud to live there. Clean streets are often cited among the most important elements of making somewhere a good place to live, with over 70% of people in England concerned about the appearance of their neighbourhood.

- Helping young people feel a sense of responsibility for an area can be vital in making sure it is used and cared for. Involve them in planning, designing and building spaces and facilities.
- As well as focusing on neighbourhoods, encourage work at a hyperlocal level. When people feel accountable to their immediate neighbours for looking after the street and making it visually attractive, they are more likely to be advocates for wider action in future.
- Underused places like bus stops, building foyers and spaces outside shops have the potential to facilitate chance encounters where people meet, chat and get to know each other, building the familiarity that

makes them into a community. Benches and plants that make the space more inviting improve the chances of this happening.

- These encounters can also be encouraged in places where people with shared interests naturally gather. For example, parents of young children might meet regularly at a playground, and dog walkers might cross paths in the park. Improving and maintaining these spaces can help relationships to deepen.

4. Support community venues to thrive and offer a range of activities

Community venues can increase people’s sense of pride in their area, providing a shared space for events and activities, and a place for residents to come together. They can include community centres, village halls and libraries, as well as community pubs and cafes. People in areas where pride in place is lower frequently cite the lack of such social facilities as a key issue.

- Venues need to be accessible and inclusive. The refurbishments needed for this can have added benefits, for example making venues more accessible for disabled people will also make them more inviting to older people and parents of babies and toddlers.
- Putting venues with a narrow purpose into community control tends to naturally make them become broader community hubs. Community libraries and pubs, for example, often host classes, support groups and community meetings, alongside their primary functions.
- Putting activities on in the evening can make them more accessible, as people in full-time work or education can take part. But consideration is required as to how people can get home safely, whether that’s through providing free parking spaces, sharing the details of reliable public transport, or making sure events are accessible by well-lit walking routes.

- Providing too many different activities might be unaffordable for a community venue, while providing too few might limit the appeal for local people. Start small, but be ready to add options as you learn more about local preferences and needs.

5. Create opportunities for people to participate and build broader community ties

In order to keep building local pride, people need opportunities for participation so that they keep coming together and deepening their bonds. Around two-thirds of our grant holders provide opportunities for people to mix with others who are different to them, and those grants are more likely than average to also increase social contact, improve mental health, boost self-esteem, and reduce loneliness.

- Frontline workers, including teachers, nurses and shop staff, are well positioned to identify lonely or isolated people. With training, they can signpost those individuals to community services and opportunities for participation.
- Not everyone in the community will be interested in active participation; focus energy and resources on those who show an interest, as quality of participation matters more than the number of people involved.
- Participation linked to national celebrations can be easier to engage people in. The Spirit of 2012 programme built on the legacy, enthusiasm and community spirit of the 2012 Olympics to bring people together.
- Remember, people will be able to commit different amounts of time and energy, so it's worth offering a range of entry points through different roles and tasks, from basic attendance through to fully involved volunteering.
- When allocating volunteer roles, ask people to be clear about their skills and

interests, so they can be given tasks they will enjoy. Equally, make sure there is some rotation so people can try different things and meet as wide a range of new people as possible.

6. Regenerate and reimagine town centres and high streets

With footfall dropping and shops closing across the country, it's clear many of UK's high streets are in a state of decline. This atmosphere of stagnation is a major contributor to feelings of being left behind in many communities, with Power to Change noting that more than two-thirds of people worry about high street deterioration and the impact it has on civic pride.

- Largely, the decline of the high street has been the decline of retail, but that doesn't mean restoring retail alone is the solution. There's now an opportunity to make high streets more community focused and varied, combining consumer retail, community businesses, meeting places and creative spaces in a more diverse mix.
- A diverse high street community might also include credit unions, community centres, mobility scooter hire stations, pop-up events, cafes, theatres, pocket parks, flats, and galleries in empty units. This offers a healthy combination of retail, culture, residential units and community support.
- High street housing should be planned carefully and added in stages to avoid sparking a rush of development that drives up prices. Work with people who already live nearby to find out what they want in the area, in order to grow an organic, diverse community. This will help to avoid conflicts between existing residents and newcomers.
- When providing housing or business spaces at affordable rates, make sure the proposed rent is genuinely affordable for local people and social enterprises. Some of our grant holders provide spaces at

‘living rent’, which is benchmarked against local income levels and capped so it doesn’t rise beyond inflation.

7. Restore and use heritage buildings to enhance people’s connection to place, family and history

Historic England has found that 92% of people living in areas with a historic regeneration scheme felt that it had raised local pride, and 80% of people feel heritage makes their area a better place to live. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing found that activities that take place in heritage buildings can improve a sense of belonging and pride, and that just being around historic places can increase people’s pride in place.

- Community uses for heritage buildings can include harnessing local history to build a sense of shared identity; using heritage buildings as community venues; or putting education at the heart of heritage restoration, which can be more important to connecting old buildings with civic pride than the physical structures themselves.
- People from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to participate in heritage, and therefore less likely to feel the sense of pride in place that historic assets offer. Specific outreach activities can address this, making it clear that local heritage is for everyone in the community.
- Restored heritage assets need to be carefully managed and maintained. If left to fall into disrepair, they can become sites for antisocial behaviour and litter, with a negative impact on local pride.
- Get people involved through volunteering opportunities. Helping with restoration work and archaeological work, for example, can give people a sense of ownership and responsibility for their local heritage sites.

8. Harness culture to bring people together

Participation in cultural activities can increase pride in place, and our research has found that projects offering arts and heritage activities are more likely than others to result in an increased sense of community pride and belonging.

- Unconscious feelings of ownership and propriety can make some people feel spaces like libraries and museums are ‘for them’, and can make others feel the opposite. Unexpected activities in these spaces, e.g. involving noise and interaction, can help everyone to feel equal and part of a novel experience.
- Activities like theatre, dance and performance should be accessible for all members of a diverse community. That means that if props and costumes are provided, they should be suitable for different skin tones, hair types and body shapes, and reflective of different backgrounds.
- If one-off events like festivals are successful, harness the momentum to make them more regular. Encourage participants to become volunteers and get involved in organising future iterations of the event, look into funding opportunities, and gather feedback so that local people feel involved in the ongoing success of the event.

To read the full report, please visit our website:

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/insights>