



Knowledge and Learning

From neighbours to neighbourhood

Learning on how to boost pride in place

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Front cover image:

Bumpy

Introduction

One of the key policy headlines from the UK Government's 2022 white paper *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*¹ 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.

Devolved governments across the UK are also looking at a range of strategies to make their communities better places to live and work, through means that will boost civic pride. These include: 20-minute neighbourhoods in Scotland, where essential services are available within walking distance of any home; Welsh Government plans to improve the attractiveness and biodiversity of local areas; and the Northern Ireland Executive's focus on arts, culture, built heritage, outdoor recreation and cultural activities.

To achieve the UK-wide goal and ensure regional measures help people feel proud of where they live, we need a clearer understanding of what factors help build pride in place and how those factors link in with the idea of levelling up. Can pride be nurtured intentionally? What activities are most effective? Where should we start?²

The contributing elements are often interconnected and difficult to unpick. There is a link with community belonging and interpersonal connection, the facilities and activities that are available in a place and how they are used, and how an area looks and feels. But this is not to say that pride correlates with economic prosperity; some of the areas with the most developed sense of pride are among the most deprived.³

In line with this, some research also suggests that the factors that give people a sense of attachment to their communities are broadly similar from place to place: the availability of places to meet; the feeling that people care about each other; how

welcoming the community is to different types of people; and how attractive the area looks.⁴

Clearly, there is reason to believe that the link between pride and levelling up is not purely economic. Rather, it relates to the wider levelling up goal of addressing inequalities by providing opportunities,⁵ for example to socialise, to have a say in local decision making, or to make physical improvements to a neighbourhood. These are opportunities which could be present or lacking, and could be improved, in any area.

Social infrastructure plays an important part in providing these opportunities. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg defines this as including not only basic infrastructure like roads and utilities, but also outdoor spaces that bring people into the public realm, community organisations that allow people to get together, and ‘third spaces’ where people can and want to linger.⁶ Strong infrastructure of this kind helps people forge ties by facilitating “recurrent interaction”, Klinenberg argues, noting that when people experience this through things they enjoy, “relationships – even across ethnic or political lines – inevitably grow”.⁷

42%

**of National Lottery
Community Fund grant
holders tell us that
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them to deliver**

So, we can say that pride in place is about both the physical spaces in a community and the activities that take place within them. In terms of spaces, pride can be fostered by providing them, how they look and feel, and seeing them cared for and improved by residents and authorities.⁸ And in terms of activities, pride can be encouraged through having things to do, opportunities to participate, and a voice in decisions made about and for the community.

Through charities and community groups across the country, National Lottery funding provides many of these facilities and opportunities. In a typical year, 42% of National Lottery Community Fund grant holders tell us that people have more local pride and belonging because of the services or activities we support them to deliver.⁹

In this report we share practical examples and some of the key learning from this work, exploring eight ways that anyone seeking to boost pride in place can harness tips and insights from National Lottery funded organisations.



1. Empower people to design and shape where they live

Why?

External improvements to an area can build pride, but community empowerment – control of local assets and decisions about an area – is a key factor too. The UK Government’s Community Ownership Fund¹⁰ recognises this, aiming to “empower local people, restoring their pride in the places where they live” by funding communities to take charge of parts of their neighbourhood infrastructure.

Similarly, New Local’s 2022 Stronger Things programme¹¹ highlighted the link between how much say people have over decisions that affect them and how proud they feel about their community. Our funding helps facilitate this, with 16% of our grant holders reporting that their work means people feel more ownership and control over local decisions.

How?

Help residents bring their ideas for community activities to life

Community activities are at the heart of people’s experience of where they live, whether that’s engaging with social infrastructure like parks and green spaces, or interacting with one another across social divides. The voluntary and community sector does a great job in considering local needs and preferences when deciding what activities to offer, but there’s a risk that this approach might still only reach a small subset of engaged individuals.

In the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, we funded [Participatory City](#) to flip the process around, giving residents the resources, support and infrastructure to see their own ideas come to life through the [Every One Every Day](#) programme. With a focus on participation, this approach means those without the free time, energy or connections to set up a charity or apply for funding can still become active community leaders.

The organisation has a warehouse and five shops which residents can visit to discuss their interests and ideas with staff, who then work with them to set up their activities. So far, over 6,000 people have taken part, with 146 projects including community cafes, storytelling sessions, and many more. This has directly improved positive feelings about the borough, with participants rating their increased sense of pride an average of 8/10 after the first two years.¹²

The [Coffeeworks](#) project took a group of 12 residents with no previous experience, taught them how to make coffee and run a business, and then put them in charge of a community cafe. Every One Every Day took care of practicalities like insurance, planning permission and setting up the space, so that the participants could focus on running the cafe itself. “It’s such a unique thing,” one resident commented. “When I’m serving customers, I’m getting to know my neighbours. It really makes you feel like you’re part of a community.”

Learning points

- A common approach to resident involvement is to have organisations make pitches, which people then vote on to decide who gets funding. This might not be appropriate in all cases.
 - One [Ageing Better](#) grant holder reflected that it would be unrealistic to expect members of the public “to differentiate between the benefits of a bereavement service versus a dementia project” in this type of process.¹³
 - Groups providing essential services might feel uncomfortable about having to influence their neighbours to vote for them over other, equally vital, services.
- This approach may work better for fun participatory activities, but do still give people enough time and information to weigh up the pros and cons of each pitch. Consider setting rules about the format and allocated time, so those with the slickest presentation skills don't end up with an unfair advantage.



Portglenone Enterprise Group

Provide funding so that communities can decide their own priorities

The traditional approach to community empowerment is to consult people about what activities and infrastructure they want to see in their area, and then to fund specific projects to meet those priorities. However, we've found that trusting communities to directly allocate funding themselves, or contribute to designing and shaping their local area, makes a significant difference, both to how the process is perceived and to how effectively funding can be targeted.

Through the [Big Local](#) and [Invest Local](#) programmes, we've given 150 communities in England and 13 in Wales at least £1 million each to spend however they like over 10-15 years. One of Big Local's four stated outcomes is that "people will feel that their area is an even better place to live", linking the programme to local pride.

In Telford, Brookside Big Local chose to focus on initiatives that build community spirit.¹⁴ Residents decided to use funding to open a new community centre. Noting that people new to the area who spoke English as a second language sometimes felt isolated, particularly while waiting to join oversubscribed language courses, they used Big Local funding to start a welcome group. This provides information about the area and help with conversational English, helping new residents to build confidence.¹⁵

The funding model meant that local people had the resources to take immediate action to address a problem they observed, demonstrating the flexibility and efficiency community control of budgets can offer.

Resident-led decision making can also be a useful way of leveraging small amounts of funding to achieve significant impact, as local knowledge and priorities can help get

to the heart of issues to highlight action needed at a larger scale.

In Northumberland, residents in the villages covered by the [CELL Big Local](#) partnership were concerned about the amount of waste gathering on Lynemouth Bay beach, and chose to invest £500 in a clean-up event. At the event, people looked into the source of the waste and noticed that it was partly coming from a cliff near an old colliery site; as the cliff eroded it left the beach covered in rubbish and old machinery, raising concerns about the potentially dangerous amount of still-buried waste in the area.

This was enough evidence to encourage the council to carry out closer investigations, which led to major plans to excavate 200,000 tonnes of material from the cliffs. This has now grown into a £7.5 million project,¹⁶ which will clean the waste from the excavated land before replacing it, safeguarding the environment through the efforts of local residents who just wanted to make their beach a cleaner place that they could take pride in.¹⁷



Resident-led decision making can leverage small amounts of funding to achieve significant impact



Learning points

- Don't just consult people; give them a meaningful say in how money is spent locally, as this builds self-worth and confidence, and may make services more relevant, effective, affordable and sustainable.¹⁸
- Make sure the whole community has a voice. Hiring outreach workers might be necessary to ensure that those from minority communities or disadvantaged parts of the area have a fair say.
- If your team is all white or all middle-class, make a concerted effort to diversify. It's important that all local people see themselves reflected in your staff and volunteers.
- Consider paying people for their contribution. It may be unrealistic to expect residents to take on work and give their time without support or remuneration.
- Think about how to manage different points of view and disagreements. Neutral venues and independent facilitation can help give everyone a voice, enable a greater diversity of views, and unlock constructive ways to disagree.
- The above approach may also slow things down, which is not necessarily a bad thing. Taking time to build stronger relationships is worthwhile, and evidence suggests these are linked to positive feelings of belonging, ownership and pride.¹⁹
- Don't always aim for consensus; the goal is to get those with opposing viewpoints to hear and understand each other, but it's equally important not to let the loudest voices dictate things and bias overall results. Big Local offers guidance on how to deal with differences of opinion and conflicts, as well as conflicts of interest, integrity and honesty.²⁰
- Communicate frankly about what is and isn't possible. Some of our funding programmes have found this openness to be key to building understanding and constructive dialogue, helping residents understand more about how local authorities work, why some things take time, and why others may not be possible. In turn, this can strengthen relationships between residents and officials.²¹
- Community organising workshops like the Eden Project's [Community Camps](#) help make the most of volunteers' time and strengthen their leadership skills.²²
- Focusing too narrowly on resident-led work might be off-putting to some traditional funders of community organisations. Some Big Local areas felt they had missed out on potential match funding and support as a result of this,²³ even though others have found the ease of getting match funding to be one of the programme's positives.²⁴

Give young people a say in how services are run

Pride in place can be nurtured quickly, through quick wins like street clean-ups and community events. But to create a lasting, robust sense of pride, the focus has to be on the next generation. Young people need to be engaged so that they grow up feeling like empowered, respected members of a community they have helped to shape.

[Our Bright Future](#) empowered young people aged 11-24 to lead environmental change. Around two-thirds (64%) of participants took part in activities that gave them a voice in influencing local policy and practice, which also strengthened their interactions with others and gave them new skills to manage challenges.

Around three-quarters (74%) said the programme increased their sense of empowerment, with 42% keen to continue influencing local decisions about the environment and 21% intending to volunteer for wider causes in their community. This shows how engagement and empowerment can be a powerful lever for ongoing involvement, in ways most of the young people involved would not previously have considered open to them.²⁵

An evaluation of Our Bright Future found that the factors that help young people feel confident and empowered include: seeing evidence that their voices will be heard and acted on; having chances to network with other like-minded people; having the opportunity to meet professionals and decision makers; and practical skills and experience that equip them to lead change with confidence.²⁶

We also provide these opportunities through the [#iwill Fund](#), helping young people take social action by providing

them with the necessary training, tools and opportunities. As of 2021, 2,851 young people had taken part, with participants reporting that they felt like part of a wider community through the process, and that they had influenced services or spaces in their area.²⁷

In Manchester, #iwill funded [Greater Manchester Youth Network](#) to help young people with additional needs shape public transport provision. The project started by supporting participants to access and use public transport safely. The group then set up meetings with Transport for Greater Manchester, so that young people could share ways they felt the transport network could be made more accessible for them and their peers.²⁸

Even though the changes they influenced might take a few years to come into effect, the young people clearly benefited from being trusted and empowered. But it's important not to assume this will be obvious in all cases; a lot of young people are wary of attempts to engage them. Recruiting staff with a similar background to the target audience can help with this, as participants will find it easier to relate to role models who share their experiences.

74%
of Our Bright Future
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Learning points

- Harness the skills young people develop from having a voice – confidence, communication, listening, teamwork – to support them to enter work or training.²⁹
- Provide different entry points and levels of engagement so that young people can commit their time in a way that works for them.³⁰
- Support young people with advice from trusted adults, so that co-designed services are informed by both lived and professional experience. Young people tell us they don't always have solutions to the issues affecting them.³¹
- Think about ways to engage young people who might never get a say. It may be dangerous for some teenagers to leave their postcode area, and those in out-of-centre estates or areas affected by poverty may rarely leave their immediate neighbourhood.³²



2. Improve and safeguard local amenities

Why?

Amenities are the physical cornerstones of a community. The services they provide, from food and transport to places for people to meet, can be the difference between a thriving area that people are proud of and a struggling one that people feel is left behind. Where provision doesn't meet local needs, however, there is a risk of entrenching inequality. The resulting rising prices and – in some cases – falling standards can make life worse for people,³³ affecting their ability to feel pride in the area.

With support, there are two main ways that communities can respond to this: taking assets and services into direct ownership, or building momentum to make a strong case to authorities that new or improved services are required. The former might see community groups form to reopen a closed village shop or pub, while the latter could see people get together to build evidence of demand for better transport links or facilities.

In either case, funding can be the key that unlocks momentum. In a typical year, 45% of our grant holders report that their grants help them improve local places and spaces or deliver activities linked to community assets and facilities, including building works and refurbishments. And 23% report that their work contributes to communities having better access to key infrastructure like community transport, while 5% work to save amenities like shops, pubs and cafes from closure.³⁴

How?

Put assets and infrastructure in community control

Direct community ownership of local infrastructure gives people “an equal stake in its success and future”, according to the Local Government Association. This is an important aspect of pride in place – when people are given opportunities to own and maintain the critical assets that form the fabric of their neighbourhoods, they are more likely to feel a sense of pride and responsibility.³⁵

In Aberdeenshire, we funded the [Udny Community Turbine](#), putting energy generation in community hands for the villages of Udny Green and Pitmedden. After one year of operation the turbine had generated £120,000, and over its 20-year lifespan this is expected to rise to £5 million – around £2,000 for every resident.³⁶ Residents have since set up a trust to put some of the profits to use for local improvements, including an accessible community building and a community cafe, so that they can enjoy and take pride in the benefits of their self-sufficiency.

Social amenities can also benefit from community ownership. Pubs, for example, are more than just places to eat and drink; they are often inextricably tied to people's sense of local identity, and serve as the primary social venues for towns, villages and suburbs across the country. Between 2008 and 2018, around a quarter of the UK's pubs closed³⁷ and, as the Bennett Institute notes, “they are rarely replaced with an amenity that plays a similar community-wide role”.³⁸

Community ownership offers a solution here, with research finding that 68% of community pubs provide meeting spaces, 33% raise funds for local charities or good causes, 35% are a base for physical activities such as walking or cycling, 58% source local food, 21% have a community garden, and 23% run affordable meal clubs. They also employ an average of 13 people each, and offer training opportunities for those furthest from the job market.³⁹ Successful campaigns to bring pubs into community control provide a sense of pride and empowerment, as does the ongoing ownership of a key asset for the area.⁴⁰

In Carmarthenshire, we funded the [Cwmdul Inn](#) to refit its kitchen, helping the pub – which also serves as shop and post office to the village – to keep running events and functioning as a social hub. In Shropshire, we funded [Neenton Community Society](#) to carry out consultation work that led to taking on the derelict Pheasant pub. Since opening, it has employed 50 young people and serves as the social heart of the village. As a member of the society explained to the Plunkett Foundation: “We had no school, no village hall and no shop. Restoring [the pub] gave the village a future.”⁴¹

That said, it’s important that communities take on assets with their eyes open. The cost of renovating and maintaining old or derelict buildings can quickly mount, pushing groups into debt when running costs outstrip income. The More Than a Pub programme, run by [Power to Change](#) and partners, encouraged community groups to create business plans setting out their routes to financial sustainability. This mitigated their risk through such means as community share offers, and partnerships with local businesses like breweries and food suppliers.⁴²



Bumpy



**When people own
local assets, they are
more likely to feel a
sense of pride**



Learning points

- To maintain a sense of pride, it's important that buildings and land do not become liabilities. Ensure that due diligence is completed and that communities have the right mix of skills and experience to be successful owners.
- A paid project manager will help relieve pressure on volunteers and the project team.
- Plan for financial sustainability, but be cautious about over-optimistic financial projections.^{43,44} We've found that organisations aren't always able to realise the income they plan for. Room hire, which a lot of groups rely on, may not generate enough income in the context of the 2022 cost of living crisis.
- As well as core building and acquisition costs, things to consider include running and maintenance costs, leases, legal and planning fees, insurance, and travel costs.⁴⁵
- Reinvest profits into local good causes that residents prioritise, so people see the cause and effect of their time and hard work.
- Provide money and advice to help make venues more energy efficient or use renewable energy. Organisations have told us this can be transformational and "almost like having a new grant every year", as it frees up money to spend on bringing the community together, rather than on utility bills.⁴⁶



Climate Action Fund launch

Empower communities to make the case for essential services

The community ownership model can be a lifeline, yet some elements of infrastructure are too large or complex to be realistically taken into direct control. In urban areas, for example, only chain supermarkets have the networks and economies of scale required to provide the volume of food that local families need, at a cost they can afford. Similarly, public transport can be provided at a subsistence level by community initiatives, but without being part of the main transport network an area can quickly become isolated, exacerbating a sense of being left behind.

This doesn't mean that communities have no role to play in bringing in and enhancing these services. The levelling up white paper acknowledges the connection between pride in place and empowering communities to develop solutions to problems that matter most to them,⁴⁷ and this remains the case even if the solutions themselves are not directly community owned.

In Bristol, residents in Lawrence Weston put this into practice. A lack of public transport connections meant that people had trouble getting to work in an area with below-average car ownership, and over 60% of residents felt that public transport links to jobs were a problem.⁴⁸ This risked entrenching unemployment, with a directly negative effect on local pride.

In response, the area's Big Local group – [Ambition Lawrence Weston](#) – worked with employers in the area to set up a community shuttle bus. While this provided a lifeline in the absence of a fully serviced bus route, its most important achievement was to build evidence of demand and need for public transport. This was crucial in convincing First Bus to run services through

Lawrence Weston as a more permanent solution, and there are now four different bus routes serving the area.⁴⁹

The Big Local group also knew that residents were concerned about the affordability of food, as there was no low-cost supermarket in the area, and 71% of respondents rated local shopping facilities as poor and needing improvement. In response, the group used Big Local funding to hire a consultant to build evidence of demand, and then presented this to their MP and Bristol City Council. This evidence convinced the council to reconsider selling a derelict college site to housing developers, and in 2018 a major Lidl branch opened on the site instead.⁵⁰

“

There's a connection between pride in place and empowering communities to develop solutions to problems

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African Caribbean
Community Association

Learning points

- Don't assume that using community momentum to shape public or private sector decision making is easy. Local authorities typically have a lower risk appetite than resident groups, while private companies will be less willing to run services at a loss.
- Be patient when building an evidence base; Ambition Lawrence Weston's shuttle bus service ran for two years before First Bus agreed to serve the area.
- Make sure people are aware of the social mission behind initiatives.⁵¹ The Plunkett Foundation found that few community shops generate a profit of more than £10,000, but community ownership and the commitment of local volunteers contribute to their "remarkable durability".⁵²
- Provide a flexible service, both so that community-run amenities can maximise revenue streams and so that they meet different needs.
- Ensure community transport services are accessible for older or disabled people to help those residents increase social contact and reduce feelings of isolation, contributing to social connectedness and belonging.⁵³
- Encourage volunteering by providing a service that the community values, with objectives that reflect the needs and interests of locals. This can help sustain the work and further develop feelings of pride and belonging.⁵⁴



East Lothian Council

3. Make the local environment feel safe and look attractive

Why?

How an area looks and feels is at the core of pride in place. Research has found that clean streets are regularly 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.⁵⁵ There is an economic aspect to this, as budget reductions have reduced councils' ability to stay on top of issues like vandalism, graffiti and litter,⁵⁶ although government schemes like the £9.75 million cash boost to clean high streets⁵⁷ have helped.

Unclean streets also go hand-in-hand with unkempt green spaces, which the Bennett Institute notes has direct consequences for civic pride, leading to “pessimism and disenchantment”.⁵⁸ This makes vital social meeting places unwelcoming, with people feeling less safe in unclean areas.⁵⁹ Our grant holders tackle this, with 16% offering environmental activities in a typical year.⁶⁰ We've found that these actions are more likely to increase participants' sense of local pride and belonging than other types of activity.⁶¹

This work includes high level climate action, but simple, participatory activities like litter picking, planting flowers, recycling and renovating green spaces are equally important, and perhaps even more so when it comes to pride in place. Our Community Research Index highlighted ‘keeping the area looking nice’ and ‘having access to green spaces’ as two of the top five most important areas of improvement for communities.⁶²

How?

Focus on visible improvements alone or as part of larger projects

Given the importance people place on how clean and attractive a neighbourhood looks, improvements in this area are an excellent way to spark environmental, economic and cultural change. In Liverpool, the [Granby Four Streets](#) area faced deprivation and dereliction from the 1980s through to the 2000s, with streets of abandoned houses and empty shops. To start making improvements, residents got together to plant flowers, install planters and encourage ivy to grow on empty units.⁶³

This helped people think about how else they wanted to improve their neighbourhood, instilling enough pride to get them thinking positively about the future. They set up a community land trust, which we have supported through grants for communications, skills workshops, newsletters and translators. The land trust has since renovated 13 houses which have been sold or rented at affordable rates, set up a community hub with a cafe, and established a monthly street market. This all started with a few local people showing that they cared.

Just as small acts that demonstrate pride can grow into major change, a boost to local pride through visible improvements can also be an important co-benefit of larger environmental projects. We funded [Middlesbrough Environment City](#) to run 15 different pieces of climate action work across the town, one of which focused

on providing training and space for food growing and gardening.

People trained in these skills then put them to use in transforming the back alleys of Middlesbrough's ubiquitous Victorian housing blocks, which were previously mainly used for access and storing bins. Through planting flowers, fruit trees and vegetable patches, the alleys became vibrant community spaces that people felt proud of. Some older residents were initially hesitant due to previous perceptions of the alleys as unsafe, but the addition of gates and security cameras helped to ensure people of all ages felt comfortable spending time in them.

For projects like this to work, you need participants. Much as some people may be driven solely by wanting to improve the neighbourhood, others will be more attracted by the bonding, togetherness and interaction offered by taking part, so it's worth promoting this aspect when trying to get people involved. Residents who are already involved in environmental work are likely to be the easiest to engage, but to broaden the intake whole-community volunteering days can help. For this, groups drawn from a single street or block tend to work better than those from a wider area.⁶⁴

Of course, some areas might lack obvious public spaces in which to start planting and making improvements. Where an area has a lot of derelict buildings and empty plots, there might be the opportunity to create what [Groundwork](#) calls 'meanwhile spaces'.⁶⁵ These are spaces earmarked for future development, but lying unused at the moment. In Northern Ireland, Groundwork hosts gardening sessions and events in the spaces, making them active locations that people can be proud of, rather than eyesores.



How an area looks and feels is at the core of pride in place



Learning points

- Involve young people in making local improvements, and harness their pride in their achievements. This can turn them into active advocates for the area.⁶⁶
- Recruit young people in planning, designing or building new outdoor spaces and facilities they are likely to use. As well as giving them a sense of ownership and pride, this can also lead to a reduction in vandalism.⁶⁷
- Encourage work at a hyperlocal level to give people a shared sense of ownership through feeling accountable to their immediate neighbours and being proud of their own street. This can help keep people engaged and turn them into advocates for ongoing action.⁶⁸
- Explore the potential of underused places like bus stops, building foyers, and even the spaces outside shops. These all have potential to be ‘bumping spaces’ where people can naturally meet and get chatting. Small additions that encourage people to linger – like a comfortable bench – can help them start to talk and build familiarity with others.⁶⁹
- Improve existing bumping spaces where people with shared interests, like dog walkers or parents of young children, might gather. This can turn unexpected spaces into natural incubators for trust and mutual support.⁷⁰



Clwb Rybgi Bethesda

Create local engagement to support large-scale projects

Finding ways to involve and engage the community in major projects that impact the local environment can be key to ensuring those activities boost pride in the area. In Derry/Londonderry, we funded Drumahoe District Park through the Space and Place programme.⁷¹ The £1m project saw Derry City and Strabane District Council work with the local community to determine residents' preferences for the park.

For example, children at Drumahoe Primary School were consulted on their play needs and equipment preferences, specifying that they wanted active and challenging equipment in a multi-use games area. Older residents, meanwhile, noted that they wanted an accessible, secure walkway to access both the upper and lower parts of the park without crossing play areas. Residents were also consulted on opening times, agreeing daytime restrictions so that local schoolchildren could use the park safely at lunchtimes.

This engagement helped people to feel like they had an active role in creating the park and a responsibility for taking care of it, building a connection that boosted local pride. As evidence of the project's success, the council is now working to secure additional funding to create a community forest and enhanced green infrastructure for the wider community close to the park. This will follow the same engagement model, working with community groups and faith groups to facilitate an even larger green space in the area.

There may also be opportunities to promote the personal benefits of getting involved, such as improving physical and mental health. At [Newquay Community Orchard](#),

for example, 19% of participants reduced their use of medication and 33% reduced their use of GP services after getting involved in activities like tree planting and growing vegetables.

Learning points

- Don't assume people know how to get involved. Our Community Research Index⁷² found that people are aware of the need for communities to take a role in environmental improvements, but most are unaware of the actual opportunities available in their area.
- Promote opportunities for involvement as widely as possible, through spaces like schools, GP surgeries, shops and community hubs.
- Provide free resources wherever possible; people are much more likely to turn up and have a go if they don't need to buy equipment or carry tools.



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

Why?

Research has found that community venues can increase people's sense of pride in their area,⁷³ giving them a feeling of empowerment, a place to come together, and a hub for the events and activities that form the fabric of community life. Conversely, a lack of venues can increase feelings of being left behind that are antithetical to pride, with people in communities with a low sense of pride citing the lack of places to meet and the loss of social facilities as key issues for them. These social facilities include community centres, village halls, libraries, and other local hubs, with Create Streets⁷⁴ noting that “when [they] close, it can be a potent symbol and driver of decline”.

This problem could be avoided if local authorities and private property owners were able to provide spaces to become community venues, but – as the research notes – their interests too often “are not aligned with communities’ interests, leaving property empty and heritage buildings neglected”. National Lottery funding fills this gap, helping communities take control of their own spaces, build or refurbish them as needed, and provide activities within them.

How?

Provide financial support to build or refurbish community venues

Between 2016 and 2021, we supported more than 1,500 community centres and village halls in England and Wales. £119 million in funding supported an average of four spaces per local authority, at an average

of £75,000 in capital costs and £217,000 in revenue costs for each area.⁷⁵ Importantly, this funding allows communities to put their needs and priorities first, designing and fitting out buildings that best serve residents. In turn, this gives each venue the best possible chance to garner and improve pride.

In Wereham, for example, the [village hall](#) had been in operation for years in a wooden building dating from the First World War. When this was declared structurally unsound and beyond economic repair, we provided funding to build a new hall. This was done following two years of consultation with local people, which highlighted the desire for an environmentally friendly building and the need for the hall to be financially self-sufficient. The new building became the UK's first village hall to be Passivhaus accredited,⁷⁶ with a cafe and hireable meeting rooms to generate revenue going forward.

In his book *Palaces for the People*, Eric Klinenberg notes that public libraries are among the most important types of social infrastructure, offering open access that isn't time-limited and a range of services specifically aimed at older people.⁷⁷ Their importance is also growing as the UK's cost of living crisis develops, with 44% of public libraries having experienced increased demand and 81% preparing for an additional increase in use from people who need to keep warm due to increasing energy prices.⁷⁸

In 2012, Lambeth Council signalled its support to transfer the [Upper Norwood Library](#) building, which had been part of the community for over 100 years, to community control to safeguard its future. Locals formed a trust and took on the running of the library in 2016, with support from Power to Change. Since then, it has grown to welcome around 13,000 people a month, and now hosts cultural events and offers hireable meeting spaces to raise income. There's also a cafe run by a self-taught local woman, making the library a more attractive place to visit and spend time.

It is now a core part of the community, offering digital inclusion classes, English language lessons, holiday childcare, parent and child sessions, and a library of things. It also hosts events to help people get to know each other better, encouraging social interaction, and provides support to social enterprises. Since 2018, the library has hosted an annual community arts festival, giving local musicians, comedians, actors and artists a platform.⁷⁹ On the back of this successful development from library to community hub, the library's management team worked with Locality to set up a national [peer network for community-managed libraries](#).

We supported more
than

1,500

community centres
and village halls in
England and Wales
from 2016 to 2021

Learning points

- To maximise participation, don't just think about the fabric of the building, but also about making it accessible and inclusive. Making venues more accessible for disabled people will also make them more accessible for older people or parents of babies and toddlers. Clear signage to help people with dementia will make it easier for everyone to find their way around.
- Consider free wi-fi and having dedicated spaces where people can linger in warmth and comfort without having to sign up for classes or pay for food or drinks.
- Research suggests that putting libraries into community control makes them develop naturally into local hubs, due to their flexibility and willingness to experiment in response to residents' needs.⁸⁰



Connect Community Trust

Use venues as a base for activities that engage the whole community

Where the buildings themselves already exist, there remains a need for them to provide activities and events to engage people. Passively existing goes some way to serving the community, but it's the effort to bring different groups together and engage a wider group of people that really makes these venues important.

These events and activities provide positive social interactions, the chance to meet new people, opportunities to learn new skills, and support networks for isolated or vulnerable individuals. Local Trust research⁸¹ notes that these outcomes can seem “soft or fluffy”, but that they are “exactly the kind of changes that cumulatively create enhanced quality of life [and] increase civic pride”. This is because activities and events directly shape people's relationship with where they live, making their immediate surroundings more visible and helping to form a bond between person and place.⁸²

In Plas Madoc in Wales, the leisure centre was the last remaining amenity after local shops, health services and pubs all closed down. When the council closed the leisure centre as well, locals formed Splash Community Trust to take on the lease, and [Plas Madoc Leisure Centre](#) is now run for the benefit of the community.

As well as swimming lessons and fitness classes, the centre hosts community events and services provided by local organisations [We Are Plas Madoc](#) and [The Land](#). These include a physical and social activity group for young people, helping them to build connections and improve their mental and physical health. There's also a youth forum to give young people a voice in decision making, a support group for parents, and a monthly bingo evening.

While there is appetite for a full-fledged community centre, the leisure centre has been key in keeping the community together and meeting local needs. Splash Community Trust was named Welsh Social Enterprise of the Year at the 2018 Social Business Wales Awards⁸³ in recognition of its success, and the group states as one of its aims that it wants to make people proud, skilled and empowered.⁸⁴



Every One Every Day

Learning points

- [Community First's](#) Loneliness Toolkit for Village Halls focuses on encouraging isolated people to take the first step from home into activities, but the learning – including how to promote events, how to attract volunteers and the facilities that people value – is useful and relevant for any community venue.⁸⁵
- Running events and activities at night means people in full-time work can take part, but consider how people can get to and from your venue safely. Are paths well-lit so women feel safe to walk on dark nights? Is there somewhere to park nearby, or decent public transport that can be relied on to turn up and get people home safely? If not, can you develop a pool of trusted volunteers to offer lifts?
- Consider the tension between financial prudence and community engagement, when it comes to the number of activities on offer. Local Trust research found that venues with between one and five activities are more likely to achieve a fiscal surplus than those with six or more.⁸⁶ However, fewer options might limit the number or breadth of people drawn to the venue. It might make sense to start small and gradually add activities after sounding out people's preferences.
- Use neutral spaces to help different people feel more equal, and open up cultural and religious events to all to help people get to know those they might not ordinarily meet.



Monkstown Boxing Club

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

Why?

People meeting and talking is the first step towards building a community that residents can feel proud of. In the long term, participation is also key – people need opportunities and reasons to keep coming together and interacting. 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.⁸⁷

If people get these benefits from their local community, they are more likely to feel positive and proud of it too.

Research from the What Works Centre for Wellbeing⁸⁸ found that events can improve social relations, encouraging interaction between generations, ethnic groups and socioeconomic groups.

The research also highlighted volunteering as an aspect of ‘placemaking’ – the participatory process of involving residents in designing their shared public spaces and services. Our funding helps to mobilise 290,000 volunteers in a typical year, with 82% of the organisations we fund making use of them. These opportunities directly boost participants’ sense of belonging and empowerment, improving pride in place as a result.

How?

Provide opportunities for people to mix

In order to feel a sense of pride in where they live, people need to feel like part of the place – this means knowing their neighbours and feeling connected to them. [The Big Lunch](#) is an annual weekend for just this purpose. It sees neighbours meet in large or small groups to spend time together and get to know one another. Over the past four years, an average of seven million people have taken part, with more than 200,000 individual events in 2021 alone.

It might sound simple, but getting people together at this scale has made a real difference to communities across the country. After attending, around 80% of participants report feeling a stronger sense of community pride and belonging due to taking part, with a similar proportion reporting that they made new friends, felt less lonely, and thought that the events helped to bring together different generations and ethnic groups.⁸⁹

The effect of meeting and mixing with those who are different is subtle, but important. It’s not about forcing deep and meaningful friendships across divides, but rather about creating what research has termed ‘weak ties’. These are casual connections with

acquaintances and neighbours, which give us the sense that we live in a community of recognisable individuals whose interests we share, rather than strangers.⁹⁰ They are vital for reducing social isolation and encouraging people to look out for each other, which in turn fosters a sense of togetherness and pride.

Sandringham Park in Wetherby was used for a Big Lunch event that focused on intergenerational connection. Prior to the event, the park was mainly used by teenagers, with older residents avoiding it due to its reputation for antisocial behaviour. At the Big Lunch, participants of all ages met, heard each other's viewpoints, and agreed ground rules for using the park together so that everyone felt both safe and welcome. Young people who use the park now also take responsibility for keeping it clean, and one volunteer described it as "a jewel in the crown" for the area.

80%
of Big Lunch
participants report
feeling a stronger
sense of community
pride and belonging



African Community Centre

Learning points

- Train people on the front line like shop workers, nurses and teachers to identify people who are lonely or isolated. Those who feel outside of the community won't feel proud of it until they feel part of it.
- Provide opportunities for anyone to get involved, but focus energy and resources on those who show an interest and want to be active participants.⁹¹ You can't reach absolutely everyone; the quality of participation may matter more than the volume.
- Make events as accessible as possible to maximise the potential social ties to be formed. Welcome children so that families, especially single-parent families and those with low incomes, don't miss out. As well as improving intergenerational bonds, this allows parents to share childcare as a group, helping them appreciate what being part of a community can offer.
- Link events to national celebrations where possible, as this can make it easier to engage people. For example, we tied the 2022 Big Lunch in with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee,⁹² harnessing existing enthusiasm to maximise engagement and reach.



Provide volunteering opportunities

For individuals, participation is often the first step towards a more involved and engaged role in community life through volunteering. In turn, volunteering has a significant impact on how people feel about themselves and their community. Research into our Coronavirus Community Support Fund found that, of those who volunteered, 56% said the experience had given them a stronger sense of community connection. Compared to national statistics, volunteers were also more likely to report a strong sense of belonging (76% compared to 63%).⁹³

In County Antrim, [Carnlough Community Association](#) focuses on boosting civic pride through volunteer-led community services and skills programmes. These include a gardening club, a summer scheme for schoolchildren, a newsletter, and wellbeing kits for isolated residents. Projects are decided on by a village forum of local people, ensuring that participants can also help to shape the future of the organisation's work. This gives people a journey from initial participation through to volunteering and strategic involvement, increasing their sense of ownership and responsibility at each stage.

Volunteering also provides a way for people to build weak ties and the related sense of belonging, especially if they themselves feel marginalised within their communities. [Can Do Cymru](#) supports young disabled people aged 16-35 to lead on social action in their communities. Within the project's first year of operation, it had engaged 262 young disabled people, who contributed over 2,200 hours of volunteer time.

This included working with Matt's Cafe, a pay-as-you-feel community cafe, to put together care packs for homeless people

in Swansea, reaching over 150 homeless people in the city in December 2020 alone. This provided a connection between two often-marginalised groups, as well as between volunteers themselves. Notably, each and every one of the volunteers said the experience had made them feel more included in their community.

56%
of those who
volunteered as part
of our Coronavirus
Community Support
Fund said the
experience had given
them a stronger
sense of community
connection



Learning points

- Provide different points and levels of entry, so people can contribute as much or as little as they want. Informal or micro volunteering opportunities, like shopping for a vulnerable neighbour, may help strengthen connections between place, community and individuals in a way that's not always reflected in more formal volunteering.
- Make it easy and fun for people to play their part. Having a stock of free grabbers and bags can encourage people to take part in litter picks, while collected materials from clean-ups, like sea glass or plastic, can be used for shared craft or social enterprise activities.
- Repeat events weekly, monthly or annually, so that people can get used to them and feel comfortable taking part. Some residents will get involved from the beginning, but others will need time to join in.
- Though there is a cost in hiring and training volunteer coordinators, a good one will keep volunteers engaged and allocated to the right work, while getting the most from their skills, knowledge and passion.
- Encourage volunteers to be clear about their skills and interests, so they can be placed in roles they will enjoy. But allow for rotation too, so people have a chance to try different things and find what works best for them.



Lagmore Youth Project

Be intentional and creative to actively welcome and engage people

Regardless of how many events and opportunities are available to people, and how effectively they are advertised, most people will remain unaware of them. Michel Bachmann's theory of engagement refers to this silent majority as 'passive consumers' – people who might turn up to an event once if there is a direct benefit, but mostly tend not to.⁹⁴ For many community groups, it may not be worth the time, effort and expense involved in trying to engage this group, when focus is better directed at those who want to get involved.

Charities that use street or community connectors, however, view this differently. They see dedicated local individuals focus on a few streets – around 100-200 households – and work intensively to make people feel welcome and link them to nearby activities and services, regardless of how engaged they are. The [Together We Can](#) initiative in Birmingham uses this model, with connectors knocking on people's doors to initiate conversation, a pop-up conversation stand outside a local school aimed at parents, and youth engagement targeted at meeting places like parks, shops and takeaways.

One connector met a parent whose teenage child was struggling at school. The connector linked the family with a youth organisation that offered maths tutoring, and helped them get involved with a local social enterprise. In another instance, a connector happened to knock on the door of Greggs' regional engagement officer. The conversation led to a long-term partnership, which sees Greggs donate unsold food for a weekly community lunch.

An interesting aspect of Together We Can is that most street connectors have significant

pressures and struggles in their own lives. Knocking on strangers' doors can be as much a therapeutic interaction for them as for those they meet. But they're also realistic about the approach; connectors always work in pairs for safety, and they acknowledge that there will be hostile responses as well as positive ones.

Overall, the project is making a real difference to individuals across the Firs and Bromford neighbourhood. In its second year, 92% of adults surveyed reported knowing more of their neighbours by name, and 98% reported having more neighbours they could turn to for help.⁹⁵ The crucial point is that these are not necessarily typically engaged, active community members – those that Bachmann calls 'stewards' and 'co-creators'. They're normal people who become significantly more engaged and connected thanks to the project's active outreach.

“ Participation is often the first step towards a more engaged role in community life through volunteering ”



African Community Centre

Learning points

- Be imaginative in finding people who may be missing out. [Ageing Better in Camden](#) used street outreach close to where activities for older people were taking place to reach isolated older residents. Just chatting casually and hearing people's stories helped create a rapport, and the chance to informally introduce them to local services and activities. Other simple actions included dressing casually, and not in branded clothes, which older people associated with street fundraisers.⁹⁶
- Give someone the specific task of creating a warm welcome for new attendees. This can make all the difference to whether people will come again. They should meet and greet people as they arrive, show them round, and put them at ease by explaining where to sit, get a cup of tea, or find the toilet, as well as introducing them to others to get conversation flowing.⁹⁷

East Lothian Council



6. Regenerate and reimagine town centres and high streets

Why?

The UK's high streets are in decline, with footfall dropping⁹⁸ and shops closing⁹⁹ across the country, a fact which has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the levelling up white paper notes, the “atmosphere of decline” that this creates can undermine pride in place. Research suggests that this atmosphere has a more significant impact in town centres than elsewhere, with the decline of the high street at the core of feelings of being left behind.¹⁰⁰

Power to Change notes that more than two-thirds of people worry about high street deterioration and the impact it has on civic pride.¹⁰¹ The decline of retail tends to be the main cause of this situation, alongside changing employment trends.

But to revitalise the high street in a way that also restores a sense of local pride, retail alone is not the answer. Our grant holders are helping to redefine and diversify high streets to become more community focused and varied in their use, combining community businesses, meeting places and creative spaces, helping town centres be places to be proud of once more.¹⁰²

How?

Support community businesses

Power to Change has found that community businesses serve as ‘destination places’, increasing overall footfall in city centres that then benefits other local businesses.¹⁰³ They also attract a more diverse set of high street users and provide an economic boost – for

every £1 spent by community businesses, 56p stays in the local economy.¹⁰⁴ All this combines to make high streets with community businesses more vibrant, welcoming and productive places, which communities feel ownership of and take pride in.

High streets in small towns and villages are particularly at risk of decline, lacking the nightlife economy that keeps major urban centres thriving.¹⁰⁵ Losing businesses in these places can be life-altering for residents. In Broughton in the Scottish Borders, the only local shop closed in 2018. People were faced with a two-hour round trip, with limited public transport options, to get to the next nearest place to buy essentials.

In response, helped by a [Scottish Land Fund](#) grant, a group of residents started running the local shop as a community business, which has been a real success.¹⁰⁶ Crucially, the store has worked closely with other establishments, including the village hall and a tea room. Both places distributed information and application forms when the village store was fundraising through community shares, and both have since benefited from the shop ensuring regular footfall.

There were similarly positive results from the [Village SOS](#) programme, which we ran to support rural communities to thrive. More than 50% of respondents felt that the work done through the programme, from community cafes and hubs to village halls and country parks, had increased pride in the area. In one of the locations, however, the figure was 83%. Here a new community

shop – the only one in the village – alongside a post office, cafe, community hall and meeting rooms, filled essential gaps that the community had been missing. By offering tangible benefits and enabling people to meet many of their day-to-day needs without leaving the village, they reached a large proportion of residents, and gave the village “a heart [where] all ages and sections of the community can congregate.”¹⁰⁷

These findings suggest that retail still has an important role to play in the diversified high street. By reducing the need to travel to buy essentials, and by showing people that their community can run things by and for itself, community shops provide a sense of self-sufficiency that is a key factor in boosting local pride.

In urban areas, there is no shortage of shops, so community businesses differentiate themselves by offering something different. In many cases, their focus on people before profit sees them turn into hubs, especially for marginalised community members. Our support for many of these businesses is indirect, coming through Power to Change, which we set up through a £149 million endowment in 2015 to support community business across England.

In St Helens, Power to Change helped [Cafe Laziz](#) get started with a £14,000 investment. It was set up in 2019 by an English language teacher who noticed that even after being granted refugee status, her students still faced difficulty finding work. The cafe helps them to build their confidence and language skills through hospitality and cooking training, as well as helping them to build a sense of community with one another and local people.

It has now started hosting craft sessions, networking events, talks and donation drives, serving as a community hub. This is helping to build ties between refugees and long-term locals, which reduces the sense of ‘otherness’ and boosts community pride. One small example of this process in action is that the cafe’s Arabic food has been so popular with customers that jacket potatoes have been taken off the menu.¹⁰⁸



Power to Change has found that community businesses serve as destination places



Eco Rangers



Learning points

- Engage with community businesses on what support they specifically need. Power to Change found that over a third feel traditional support providers like local enterprise partnerships do not sufficiently understand the sector.¹⁰⁹ In Liverpool, [Kindred](#) provides networking and advice from peers in the sector, and has found this a powerful way to maximise impact and better serve and engage the wider community.¹¹⁰
- [My Community](#) brings together a range of practical learning resources from 12 organisations including Locality, ACRE, NCVO and Power to Change to help anyone wanting to make their community a better place to live.



African Caribbean Community Association

Create high street communities

The success of the fight to save high streets depends on making them into communities again. As Power to Change has noted, high streets used to be “as much civic as commercial places” and boasted “a higher proportion of housing than is seen today”.¹¹¹

In Dumfries, where half of all the shops in the town had closed by 2016, the [Midsteeple Quarter Community Benefit Society](#) has created a new town centre community. The group purchased eight empty units on the high street, with support from the Scottish Land Fund. Over the next few years, the buildings will be converted into affordable flats and business spaces, making the new community a permanent fixture of the town centre.

Importantly, this process has already started to restore local pride, interest and excitement in the area, with a vibrant culture forming around a rotating selection of creative music and art projects in the units. The ‘meanwhile’ refurbishment of the units, now that they are community-owned rather than being held privately, has generated a real buzz and encouraged people to think ahead about what they want their town centre to be in future.¹¹²

Some caution is required when it comes to housing on high streets, however. There is a risk that in the current environment of housing shortages,¹¹³ a successful scheme could spark a wave of conversions that decimate high streets. As the Bennett Institute puts it: “Allowing community and leisure spaces to be converted into private residences will hollow out town centres, damaging the quality of community life and diminishing the overall attractiveness of some towns.”¹¹⁴ To avoid this, plans for high street housing developments need a holistic approach, including a mix of different types

of spaces and uses to form a community, not just a group of living units.

High streets that include living spaces, creative spaces and community centres, alongside retail, can be collectively termed ‘hub streets’. The Centre for Social Justice notes that these could be vital for “restoring a sense of pride around dilapidated town centres”, through the inclusion of family hubs, co-working spaces, health facilities, places of worship and youth centres, among other services.¹¹⁵ ONS data suggests that towns with this diversity are actually better for retail too; hub towns’ high streets are composed of 36% retail addresses, compared with 29% on average,¹¹⁶ thanks to increased footfall and more welcoming spaces to linger and spend time.

This speaks to an important point about streets and pride – in order to feel proud of their streets, communities need to be able to spend time in them. This is difficult to do in car-dominated, congested road networks, but testing has yielded positive results. Playing Out’s [Play Streets](#) see residential streets temporarily closed to traffic, with 89% of participants feeling an improved sense of neighbourhood belonging after taking part, and the same proportion agreeing that they knew more people on their street after the event.¹¹⁷



To revitalise the high street in a way that also restores pride, retail alone is not the answer



Learning points

- Diversify services to create real high street communities. Relatively small investments can help credit unions, community centres, mobility scooter hire stations, pop-up events, cafes, theatres, pocket parks and galleries to fill empty units.
- Work with people who already live near the high street to find out what they want, rather than just building flats and hoping they will sell. This will help to grow an organic high street community, avoiding conflicts between existing residents and newcomers.
- When providing housing at affordable rates, make sure the proposed rent is genuinely affordable for local people. [Heart of Hastings Community Land Trust](#) uses the concept of 'living rent', which is based on local income and capped so it won't rise beyond inflation.¹¹⁸

Llangors Community Shop



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

Why?

Historic England research has found that 92% of people living in areas with a historic regeneration scheme felt that it had raised local pride,¹¹⁹ and 80% of people feel heritage makes their area a better place to live.¹²⁰ The What Works Centre for Wellbeing found that activities that take place in heritage buildings can improve a sense of belonging and pride,¹²¹ and that just being around historic places can increase people's pride in place.¹²² However, the same research also noted that the evidence for positive wellbeing outcomes from activities in historic landscapes and living in historic places was mainly 'lower quality'.

At the National Lottery Community Fund, we support historic buildings both because they are valuable aspects of our shared cultural legacy, and in order to harness them for community benefit. This could be through: making use of local history to build a sense of shared identity; using heritage buildings as community venues, for example to celebrate local and national events, so that they become a normal part of community life; or putting education at the heart of heritage restoration, which Public First has found is more important to connecting old buildings with civic pride than the physical structures themselves.¹²³

80%
of people feel heritage
makes their area a
better place to live



Welcome to Our Woods

How?

Renovate non-listed spaces to bring the community closer

Historic buildings tend to be listed, making them expensive to renovate and difficult to alter. However, there are often other buildings on the grounds and nearby that can be harnessed for community use, making heritage sites into assets while preserving their historical value. This means more of the community can spend more time in and around their local heritage.

In Cardiff, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the local council funded the careful restoration of [Insole Court](#), a Grade II listed Victorian Manor. At the same time, we funded the renovation of the non-listed stables, gardens and outbuildings into a cafe and community hub, providing sources of income for the venue. The spaces are now used for dance classes, yoga sessions, theatre shows and other events. This made what could otherwise be a static asset into an active public space, adding value by putting the historic manor at the heart of the community.

Key to this was focusing heritage restoration work on bringing in the local community rather than attracting tourists, through providing community spaces and activities. Tourism can bring in useful revenue to an area, but the negative impacts like increased traffic and overcrowded public spaces may actually serve to reduce pride.¹²⁴

Learning points

- Put plans in place for ongoing stewardship and maintenance of restored heritage assets. The benefits they offer can be cancelled out if they fall into disrepair, or become sites for antisocial behaviour.
- Volunteering opportunities through historic restoration and archaeology can be a good way to get people from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds and less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds engaged with their local heritage. Residents who took part in Lincolnshire's [Middlefield Dig](#) gained transferable skills, and felt a sense of community togetherness and pride through the work.¹²⁵



Climate Action Fund launch

Reach out to communities not usually served by heritage

People from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to participate in heritage,¹²⁶ and therefore less likely to feel the sense of pride in place that these assets offer. Specific outreach activities can address this, and don't necessarily need to involve large or long-term grants; small actions can make a big difference.

At Glasgow's iconic [Pipe Factory](#), we provided a small grant to help the local Friends of the Pipe Factory group reach out to the underprivileged Calton and Barras areas of the city. The group connected care-experienced young people with creative practitioners, to explore their creativity through skills training, social justice work, cultural education and business ideas. This all took place in the 1870s building, helping young people to feel a sense of ownership of a heritage asset they may not otherwise have perceived as 'for them'.

Learning points

- Think inclusively about what a heritage building looks like in your community. Places linked to a location's industrial past are obvious choices, but the UK's multicultural heritage might better be seen in spaces where people of colour have come together across several generations. These can include cafes, churches, mosques, temples, homes and workplaces.¹²⁷ Some, like the Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, date back to the 19th century.¹²⁸



Use heritage buildings to celebrate local history

As well as being unique community assets, heritage buildings are also ideal locations for exploring and promoting local history, which has been found to boost pride.¹²⁹ In Plaistow in London, the public library first opened in 1897. It was renovated in 2012 and, as part of the reopening, the local Big Local steering group used the building to launch [Growing Up in Plaistow](#) – an exhibition celebrating local history and stories.

The group recognised that the area's ethnic minority communities were keen to have their stories told – how they arrived in the UK and what brought them to Plaistow – but also that older white residents wanted to share their memories of the area's past and how their families had seen it change through multiple generations.¹³⁰ These stories, along with archive photographs, maps and other memorabilia, formed the content of the exhibition, framing all of the groups as equally important members of Plaistow and contributors to its rich heritage.

Launching it at the library's reopening event established the building as a shared venue and asset for the whole community, regardless of background. People felt a sense of pride and belonging, whether through their diversity being celebrated or their history being told, and came together through a shared sense of local identity.

Learning points

- Be prepared for complex conversations when heritage represents or was built on the profits of historical wrongs, like slavery. This does not mean buildings need to be removed, but – in line with Historic England's position¹³¹ – there should be an honest reinterpretation of what the building represents and the truth of its past. Do this in collaboration with diverse members of the community, so that everyone feels heard. Dialogue, done sensitively, can help different sides to understand one another and compromise, for example by agreeing on information text and signage that acknowledges historical controversy rather than whitewashing it.
- Be mindful too that some historical events can be used to divide people. Be thoughtful about any local sensitivities and seek advice from all sides to avoid causing offence.



8. Harness culture to bring people together

Why?

Research shows that participation in cultural activities can boost local pride.¹³² In this context, however, it's important to be clear about what we mean by 'culture'. The everyday meaning often refers to events in static spaces or performances for static audiences; these one-off events in theatres, concert venues and festival sites can help people feel proud, if they contribute to them seeing their communities as vibrant, active places.

At the same time, such events can be inaccessible to disadvantaged local people, whether through cost or perception. This can lead to feelings of exclusion that actually reduce pride. [A New Direction](#) found that disadvantaged young people in London felt a sense of 'otherness' when it came to the abundant culture offered close to where they lived, leaving them feeling like it wasn't for them.¹³³

To counter this, people need accessible, free, inclusive cultural events that happen where they live, and the most marginalised in society need better access to mainstream culture. Our research supports this, finding that projects offering arts and heritage activities are more likely than others to result in an increased sense of community pride and belonging.¹³⁴

How?

Give people the means to create their own culture

As much as targeted engagement can be key in connecting communities with

cultural events, it's important not to forget the straightforward approach; the majority of community members may not go out of their way to get involved in activities, but may still spontaneously interact with hyperlocal, simple events going on around them.

We support [Fun Palaces](#), which focuses on culture as something simple and practical which people get involved in together. It sees communities across the UK come together to plan and participate in cultural activities during an annual weekend in October. These events happen in community spaces, from high streets, beaches and orchards to pubs, churches and schools, helping to open them up to people from all backgrounds, to create a feeling of togetherness, rather than otherness. Since it started in 2014, over 700,000 people have taken part.

Activities include arts and crafts, sports, and engagement with local heritage – the focus is on participation and learning. At [Pitsmoor Adventure Playground](#) in Sheffield, a Fun Palaces event used arts and science activities to bring the diverse community together. A representative from the playground used the event to build a relationship with Sheffield Theatres, which supports creative projects across the city. This led to local children performing a dance routine at the Crucible Theatre the following year, with many Roma, Slovak, Pakistani and Somali families visiting the theatre for the first time ever.

After participating in a Fun Palaces event, 85% of people felt that it made them feel

proud of where they live.¹³⁵ To achieve this, it's important to find out what people are interested in, so that cultural events stay relevant. Prior to running Fun Palaces events, Lambeth Libraries put up posters asking 'what would you like to do or learn?' and 'what can you share or teach?', with space for people to fill in details. This provided rich insight into community preferences.

Learning points

- Make use of small or one-off events as a catalyst for bonding and ongoing connection. In Whitstable, a book swap that was part of a Fun Palaces event led to a regular writers' night that has kept community members together.
- Focus events on a defined target group. [Spirit of 2012](#) research found that while this may reach smaller numbers, it can be a platform for new opportunities. [Verbal Arts Centre](#) in Northern Ireland ran the Reading Rooms discussion project for ex-offenders aged 18-30. After the project, 10 young people from the group trained as facilitators to spread the approach to new areas.
- Make sure unconscious feelings of ownership and propriety don't make some people feel less welcome than others. Fun Palaces recommends unexpected activities, like doing something loud and active in a normally quiet space like a library or museum, so people less familiar with the venue don't feel at a disadvantage.

Ensure marginalised groups have access to culture

As research from Create London has found,¹³⁶ the UK's cultural sector is "marked by significant inequalities". These centre around race and class, but also disability, with official figures noting that disabled people are much less likely to participate in cultural activities.¹³⁷ The Spirit of 2012 programme, which we established to build on the positive legacy of the 2012 Olympic Games in London, helps people access activities including arts and culture, with a particular focus on disability.

[Cultural Shift](#), one of the programme's funded projects, saw Stockton Arts Centre put together a three-year arts initiative led by disabled people. This included: practical changes like sign language interpreters for theatre shows and audio descriptions for films; three new disabled-led productions that provided work and focus for disabled actors and production workers; and disability equality training for 166 staff members. Overall, the project supported 33 artists and attracted an audience of 2,449 people for disabled-led work.¹³⁸

All but one of the Spirit of 2012 projects that measured community pride found that it had increased by the end of their work, with Cultural Shift topping the table with a 50% increase. This was based on only 26 survey responses, but nonetheless demonstrates how important cultural inclusion initiatives can be in helping potentially marginalised community members to feel a sense of pride in place.¹³⁹

Supporting people to create art that reflects real lives not only gives them a platform, but may also help move performance from entertainment into empowerment.

[Nae Drama](#) in Glasgow involves locals in scripting sketches that bring hard-hitting stories about participants' real lives to the stage. They learn to direct and act, with professional support from trained actors. Performances tackle issues like poverty and cancer, and include conversations with audiences across the wider community. By coupling performance with signposting to support groups, the act of creating becomes a way for art to authentically reflect life and simultaneously be a vehicle for advice and knowledge for others facing similar difficulties.

[LeftCoast](#) in Blackpool and Fleetwood set out to strongly link art to place, producing work that resonates with local people by addressing both the grit and glitz of life in these seaside towns. Over 60% of participants lived in areas ranked among the poorest 20% in the country. Challenging received wisdom, the group found that many locals already felt pride and connection to their area, and that the key challenge came not in articulating this, but more in convincing other agencies like housing associations to make further improvements based on residents' ideas.

Art activities were mainly undertaken during the pandemic with the challenges of lockdowns and social distancing, but nonetheless reached over 1,500 participants and 69 volunteers from local housing estates. This not only generated a sense of connection and helped alleviate loneliness at a time when that was very difficult, but also equipped almost 400 residents with new knowledge and skills they could draw on to effect change in their lives and community.¹⁴⁰

Learning points

- Connect participants with professional artists, actors, musicians and dancers. This can be a powerful way to build confidence and skills, and do justice to people's lived experience. Artists can benefit too, through a stronger sense of community and feeling valued by their neighbours.
- Ensure cultural activities like dance and theatre are inclusive for all members of a diverse community. Providing a choice of props, costumes and wigs that are comfortable and suitable for different skin tones, hair types and body shapes can help with this.
- Expand as demand rises. This requires planning, for example recruiting more volunteers, but can have a major impact on participants. Spirit of 2012 research showed that participants in [Our Day Out](#), which saw people with dementia take part in creative arts, were much happier when sessions were increased from once a month to twice a month.



Cultural and sporting events can strengthen local identities



Build on the legacy of major cultural and sporting events

One way to make culture accessible is to make use of the enthusiasm and momentum of major events. Sporting events are a good example here; there is evidence that they can help to promote local culture, strengthen local identities, and increase people's desire to take part in community events. The evidence for this is limited in terms of long-term impact, but shows that there is broad cultural value to be extracted from them.¹⁴¹

The 2022 Commonwealth Games saw around £500 million invested into Birmingham's Perry Barr area, with benefits including a £30 million train station refurbishment, transport improvements, and the creation of up to 5,000 new homes.¹⁴² The city harnessed this levelling up momentum through the Birmingham 2022 Festival, engaging diverse local communities in deeper thinking about their history and identity.

For example, the festival's Culture in Common project saw young people create poetry, dance, theatre and photography, working with local artists to explore questions like 'how has growing up in Birmingham made me who I am?'.¹⁴³ As well as helping them to feel more of a bond with their hometown, this type of activity can ensure people feel included and recognised as part of a wider cultural event, regardless of how engaged they are by the event itself.

In Hull, National Lottery funding supported the 2017 UK City of Culture celebrations. This included the [No Limits](#) project, which reached 56,000 young people. This comprised activities to bring culture to young people, including artist residencies in schools and professional development courses for teachers to help them be more

creative. Overall, 41% of students felt they had increased their knowledge and gained new skills through No Limits, with 37% of young people in Hull feeling that the City of Culture celebrations made them want to take part in more creative or heritage activities in future.¹⁴⁴

We also supported Coventry's UK City of Culture programme in 2021. Increasing local pride was a key outcome for the celebrations, and the [Community Connectors](#) project was a significant part of this. The project saw 10 individuals co-create cultural activities in their communities to get people engaged with the larger event, making it an active experience rather than a passive one. Activities included Coventry in Colour postcard drawing sessions, the Good Neighbours songwriting project, and a floating 'village hall' on a canal boat. An interim evaluation found that 76% of people felt the City of Culture event had increased their pride in Coventry, highlighting the impact of this active neighbourhood outreach.¹⁴⁵



Learning points

- Spirit of 2012 suggests a proactive approach to turning ‘moments’ into more durable ‘movements’ and recommends:
 - Keeping in touch with event volunteers, and nudging and encouraging them to stay involved.
 - Arranging small follow-up events to further engage and keep people participating.
 - Creating opportunities for people to network and meet up, with ongoing training, support and mentoring.
 - Helping people fundraise so they can start to take a lead on designing and delivering new activities for themselves.¹⁴⁶



African Caribbean
Community Association

Conclusion

Pride is inherently personal, subjective and multifaceted, so identifying how to build and strengthen it comes with difficulties. Formal attempts to measure pride typically rely on a range of proxies like ‘sense of belonging’ or ‘local area satisfaction’.¹⁴⁷

People rate their feelings of pride in place using different criteria. How safe or attractive somewhere looks and feels, or how much people feel they belong might be common yardsticks. How and where people perceive geographical boundaries, alongside more relational factors like how much they can trust or rely on their neighbours, may also influence their feelings.

In sharing our learning on some key ingredients that we feel contribute to boosting local pride, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of how to nurture this important marker. Hard evidence about how to do this is in its relative infancy. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is “eager to develop metrics and build the evidence base”¹⁴⁸ and the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth aims to contribute by undertaking evidence reviews.¹⁴⁹

However, community work does not often meet the inclusion criteria for academic evidence reviews, so the contributions of voluntary and community sector organisations can go unacknowledged, leaving important gaps in discussions about what works. Many community-led groups struggle to know how to record or articulate their impact. Some positive outcomes may be unexpected by-products of work to deliver a group’s core mission, and so may never be recognised, captured or shared. Evidence may be emergent too, developing in response to the radical upheaval of the pandemic, or as a consequence of the war

in Ukraine or the UK’s rapidly changing economic situation. ^{150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155}

We know that National Lottery funding improves local places and spaces, enables mixing between people who are different, increases the range of facilities and events available, and creates opportunities for people to get more involved in their area. Our grant holders support people to participate or give back to their community; many also use approaches that improve people’s perceptions of how they are involved and heard. Some have a positive impact on how much control and influence residents feel they have over local decisions that affect their lives.

Charities and community groups also add real value by working directly with individuals, often in meaningful, personalised, sustained ways that build trust, strengthen belonging, and give them a reason to feel proud of themselves and their community. Overall, 42% of our grant holders say their work contributes to people feeling more local pride.¹⁵⁶

The learning explored in this report acknowledges pride as an amalgam of factors – a patchwork of subjective feelings which may be hard to change through policy and funding, and more tangible elements that can be influenced and strengthened intentionally.

By acknowledging the breadth of contribution made by our grant holders, and by recognising the value of simple, sustained acts of care, alongside community-led activities and opportunities that build and sustain social capital, we hope this report shows how the voluntary and community sector has a significant and distinctive role in helping to create the conditions for pride to build and grow.

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