

# Just Neighbourhoods? Under-representation in Community-Led Planning activity

## JN Working Paper #4: Research case overviews

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For more information about the project and to contact us, see JN Project website:  
[research.reading.ac.uk/justclp](https://research.reading.ac.uk/justclp)

## JN Working Paper #4: Research case overviews

### 1. Introduction

This working paper is the fourth in a series emanating from the [Just Neighbourhoods?](#) research project funded by the Nuffield Foundation. This sets out the case studies from across the UK, which form the core of the project's empirical work. The paper includes the emerging profiles of the areas under study, their context, and early observations. This output follows on from three prior papers discussing theory, literature, and a content review of in-scope plans. All these papers are available on the project website.

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare and Justice. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation. Visit [www.nuffieldfoundation.org](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org).

The project team is from the Universities of Reading, Cardiff University and the University of Hertfordshire. The research work is addressing five key objectives:

1. Explore understandings of social and environmental justice among selected communities across the UK
2. Examine the nature of representation and inclusivity within community-led planning (CLP) spaces and its relationship with outcomes
3. Understand how the design, process, and practice of CLP shapes the forms and outcomes of activity
4. Assess the added value CLP exhibits in relation to social and environmental justice outcomes
5. Disseminate best practice guidance to communities, government, and others involved in shaping and practising CLP

### 2. Context: the project and the research

The first three JN working papers produced through the project discussed the theoretical frame, the literature review, and the plan content review - including our approach taken to sampling. We do not rehearse this again here, but it is worth reminding ourselves that experiences from similar research elsewhere have indicated that planners and formal plans do not perform well when scrutinised in terms of social and spatial justice. For example, research on plan content in the US found that

*"... most plans do not talk about equity, nor do they include many goals and recommendations that would advance equity. More recent plans, plans in communities with more planning capacity, plans in coastal communities, and plans with strong public participation processes have stronger equity orientations" (Loh and Kim, 2021, p.181)*

Our work uses a social justice lens to examine how forms of hyper-local planning deployed in areas of objectively assessed deprivation reflect such matters. The research therefore focuses on the neighbourhood and to hyperlocal planning which has rarely, if ever, been researched in this way in the UK. As part of the preparatory stages, we set out in Working Paper #3 how we examined 107 community scale plans created in or for deprived neighbourhoods to see what is being said. This links to our framework of Justice, Equity, Deprivation, and Inclusion (JEDI) and forthcoming publications will discuss the findings of the review and our primary data collection at greater length.

Difficulty in realising just outcomes have been noted over the past couple of decades and various explanations have been offered. Some point towards the obstinacy of modernist assumptions within formal planning processes and associated attitudes concerning different or 'subaltern' knowledge and experience, which can frustrate efforts to assert justice for disadvantaged groups (Olazabal, 2021, *et al.*; Wilson *et al.*, 2008). Others suggest that policy design is lacking (Agger and Larsen, 2009; Blomkamp, 2019) and that not enough attention is directed to specific socio-economic needs or in assessing plan impact socially (Loh and Kim, 2021; Baer, 1997), or more fundamentally that economic structures militate against endeavours to render justice through planning (Harvey and Potter, 2009; Avar and Cive, 2024; Song, 2023). Taken together, the assessment appears to be that many plans are unrepresentative or are not sufficiently progressive to address questions of sustainability and spatial justice.

There appears to be a need to overtly focus on deeper, structural issues when formulating plans and policy using a range of forms of community development and community-led planning as a foundational base. We approach this by looking for both what is said, but also, in terms of the cases outlined here, what activity is taking place, and how this squares with local conditions and why particular outcomes result. This approach is designed to address our own research questions which involve developing a better understanding of what communities understand as (in)justice (in terms of procedure / outcome / empowerment). Then to consider questions of process, including how priorities are established by communities (or others on their behalf), and how they relate to questions of injustice or fairness. Finally, whether and how forms of community-led planning address issues of injustice at hyper-local scale in terms of outcomes.

Below we set out the areas that we are working with more closely in the light of the above. These are spread across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. There are clear differences in terms of policy context and this, along with explanation of the types of plans currently offered, are set out in our Working Paper #3. There are also significant processes and ongoing change that impact on individual neighbourhoods.

We now describe the case study neighbourhoods we have begun to work alongside. All cases were selected using a range of criteria including that they were in at least the most deprived 20% of neighbourhood in each country according to the relevant deprivation index (see also Working Paper 3). After a substantial process of consideration and discussion ten areas were selected.

In England four neighbourhood cases were chosen with two in Doncaster (Stainforth and Conisbrough and Denaby Main) and two in Middlesbrough (Gresham and North Ormesby). In Scotland part of Glasgow (Barmulloch & Robroyston) and a former mining community council area in Fife (Benarty) form our study areas. In Wales, the neighbouring communities of Rhyl and Colwyn Bay, both on the north coast have been selected, and in Northern Ireland West Armagh and the Colin area in the western part of Belfast, form the cases under study.

Outlines of the cases and their situation are set out below. Later outputs from the research will include findings and conclusions, but some early reflections on the work is included in the final section of this paper.

### 3. Case profiles

The profiles below are intended to give a flavour of the areas and the work now being pursued. There are images and further representations of the neighbourhoods on the project webpages, see: [JN gallery](#) Each of the cases are organised to briefly set out a profile of the area, an appraisal of the current situation, including recent activity and lastly, a brief summary of what we have learned so far.

#### 3.1 England

There is now a long history of intervention in deemed deprived areas. Many potential case areas in England are likely to have experienced previous policy and funding arrangements that have shaped approaches to community and physical development of the area. In terms of hyper-local planning English neighbourhoods have been offered the option of producing neighbourhood development plans, or using related community rights since 2011. The NDP is community-led, although in practice many areas make use of consultants to assist, while also relying on their local planning authority for support and to ensure compliance (along with an appointed neighbourhood plan examiner). More context on neighbourhood planning in England can be found in Working Paper #3 (and see Parker *et al.*, 2023 for a full review).

Middlesbrough and Doncaster have been chosen as Local Authority areas to explore further as case study locations. They have been trialling a Locality working model that involves a system change in joining up relationships between statutory organisations, partners and the local communities. In Middlesbrough, North Ormesby and Newport were both selected as the pilot areas of this way of

working through the underlying causes of community problems and help build social capital. In Doncaster, the locality way of working has led to the introduction of four Locality Plan areas in order to join up plans and strategies, improve partnership working and improve local engagement. In addition to the Locality areas, there have recently been regeneration areas identified, which include Stainforth and Conisbrough and Denaby Main and will involve ‘a new way of working’. A Thrive Locality manager, described the new approach broadly, as:

*“... the new way of working is about us looking at how we can come together to do something differently to do with the community, they are part of the solution. The community can’t do everything on their own. The Thrive approach is encouraging everyone to stand together to blow in the same direction to see that flag move - the flag can represent change and positive outcomes for many things, the place, an individual or a family.”*

#### **i. Gresham (Newport ward), Middlesbrough**

The ward is in the centre of Middlesbrough with a population of around 10,800 (2021), with a population decline of c350 people since 2011. It is ranked as the 36th most deprived ward in the country (2019). Part of the ward has been one of most deprived 100 LSOAs on each metric of the Index of Multiple Deprivation since 2004. Further information on the neighbourhood is here: [Newport Ward 2019 Report | Middlesbrough Council Open Data](#).

The area attempted to produce a full neighbourhood plan, but instead subsequently completed a Neighbourhood Priority Statement in April 2023. This is one of the few of its kind to be realised. However, upon initial interviews with the lead consultant and a community lead on the NPS, the NPS is not really viewed as being representative of the issues that the neighbourhood is facing and is not known about or referred to in neighbourhood meetings. This is precisely the type of situation that the JN research seeks to understand.

In 2009 the area faced a mass demolition of c750 houses but it was not until 2022 that rebuilding started. Over 10 years of a large area of land was left to rubble, and indeed there is still an area that is used informally for car parking. In July 2024, riots broke out in the neighbourhood and those events continue to impact on feelings of safety for people who live there. Hate crimes, racially motivated crimes, antisocial behaviour, reportage concerning female victims of violent crime are all affecting feelings of safety in the area. This is feeding an overall low level of social trust in their neighbours. There are overlapping types of poverty experienced, including income, employment, education, health deprivation. Over 2,500 children in the neighbourhood are estimated to be in low-income households.



Thus far, the NPS has had very little or no influence on the neighbourhood. A measure that is considered to be effective by research participants are the two areas that are subject to selective licensing, to respond to low housing demand, anti-social behaviour, poor housing conditions, and high levels of migration, deprivation and crime. Communication with the community leaders and further outreach to others are continuing.

## **ii. North Ormesby, Middlesbrough**

The population of the North Ormesby ward is around 3,250 and is 1 mile east of the centre of Middlesbrough. In 2015, out of 7,219 wards, North Ormesby was the 2nd most deprived ward in the country and remains the 2nd most deprived ward in the IMD 2019 (based on the national ward rank of the average overall rank per ward). Further information on the neighbourhood is here: [North Ormesby Ward Report 2019 | Middlesbrough Council Open Data](#)

The area has no formal neighbourhood planning activity. The area was designated a Big Local project area in 2013-2014 and its project has come to an end in December 2024. The project has involved funding the purchase of 26 houses, with a partnership of Middlesbrough Council and the local community through the North Ormesby Neighbourhood Development Trust, Thirteen (Housing Association) and Big Local.



The main issues in the area are high levels of income, employment, education and health poverty. The area has high violent crime rates and is ranked in the top 1.5% of areas most at risk of crime nationally. There are poor living environments, with housing in poor condition and 6% without central heating and this is seen as a cause of the high rates of asthma and COPD experienced in the area. There are over 600 children classed as living in income deprivation. Upon a site visit and initial interviews, it is clear that the neighbourhood has multiple overlapping and complex challenges, particularly with people with mental health challenges, addictions and homelessness. Selective licensing and working with landlords are also used as a response to some of the issues faced in the area. There is ongoing communication with key community actors, leaders and professionals who work in the area.

### **iii. Stainforth, Doncaster**

Stainforth is a small settlement located on the outskirts of Doncaster, with a population of 6,300 and the neighbourhood sits in the 2.5% most deprived LSOAs, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019). Further information on the neighbourhood, see: [stainforth-and-barnby-dun-community-profile.pdf](#)

Stainforth does have a neighbourhood plan, which was approved in November 2024 and has been a catalyst for the area being in receipt of Town Deal funding (£21.6m). The area has been in receipt of Doncaster City Council support and funding through a 'Shaping Stainforth' project, which is centred on supporting good health for all, and has recently been badged as a regeneration area.





Following initial interviews, a community-led tour and a council officer led tour of the area, it is evident that there is a strong community spirit in the area. The closure of the pit (the colliery closed in 2015) has been considered to be the key reason why there is “massive deprivation and led to generations of unemployment” (Stainforth NP, 2024, p4). However, towards the end of its life, the colliery employed a small number of people outside of the town, which led to the area being unable to apply for any regenerative funding that was made available for pit towns and villages. Even though it is early days, there is scepticism about the long-term effectiveness of the NDP by the community because a recent build of a large warehouse now blocks the view of the headstocks. An NDO was approved by the Town Council during the production of the NDP, which would have involved the protection of the land around the headstocks as a country park but was then voted against by local councillors. Communication with the community members, council staff and charity staff and volunteers continues.

#### **iv. Conisbrough and Denaby Main, Doncaster**

The Denaby Main part of the ward has a Population around 7,000 and is placed as one of 1% most deprived in England. While there is no neighbourhood plan for the area the Denaby Main community is a designated regeneration area. It is one of the most deprived parts of Doncaster and is also a regeneration area. Further information on Denaby neighbourhood statistics, see: [denaby-community-profile.pdf](#)





The main issues in the Denaby area appear mostly to relate to public health, including poor life expectancy (which is 11 years lower than the national average), high rates of smoking, lung cancer, and respiratory diseases and higher hospital admissions related to alcohol consumption. There is a low school attainment and high antisocial behaviour, including problems with off-road bikes and drug use. There is a visible need to improve the quality of highways and pathways throughout the neighbourhood. Work in this area has been taking place since 2015 by Well Doncaster, which has involved carrying out Appreciative Inquiry's. Support has been provided to help community members establish constituted groups to access funding and help improve the appearance of place and improve cleanliness and create a 'friends of' group of a local park that is seen as problematic for drug use and antisocial behaviour. Communication is ongoing with Council staff, community leaders and volunteers in the community.

### 3.2 Scotland

Since January 2022, and the publication of Planning circular 1/2022, local communities in Scotland now have the ability to produce statutory Local Place Plans, which whilst not part of the development plan (as in England), have statutory weight in the planning process – LPAs must take them into account when preparing their Local Development Plans. We are looking at two Local Place Plans in different Local Planning Authorities in Scotland – Barmulloch & Robroyston in Glasgow, and Benarty in Fife.

#### i. Barmulloch & Robroyston, Glasgow

Much of the Barmulloch and Robroyston is in the top 20% SIMD, and a significant proportion, to the West of the area, is in the top 10%. There are however significant disparities, with some of the Robroyston area, to the East, in the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> SIMD deciles.

The Barmulloch and Robroyston Parks for People Local Place Plan is led by the Barmulloch Community Development Company, which is located within the Springburn/Robroyston ward within Glasgow City Council. That ward has a population of 26,017. The LPP covers two Community Council areas – Wallacewell and Robroyston. The more and less deprived areas are effectively separated by the large Robroyston Park, much of which has the appearance of wasteland or re-wilded space (see images below).



The plan focusses upon green spaces, with a view to improving the large but neglected green spaces in this area, and to seek to use those spaces to bring the communities together. The consultation is ongoing, so no draft plan has yet been produced, but early sight of consultation material highlights issues including abandoned cars in parks, vandalism of play equipment and benches, poor quality paths, no lighting and concerns about antisocial behaviour. There is a history of community engagement and planning-related activity in the area, including the preparation of a flooding resilience strategy in 2019 and work undertaken by an art student in 2024.

Early indications show a significant degree of disgruntlement with the state of public open spaces in the area, and a feeling that parks in other (wealthier) parts of the city are better looked after. The consultation events deployed mixed methods (including the use of collages to elicit views on parks) accessible to everyone, from small children to older people. These are being used to draw out positive as well as negative views, and possibilities for improvements.

## ii. Benarty, Fife

Benarty is a Community Council (equivalent of the English Parish Council) comprising a cluster of former mining villages north of Lochgelly, Fife – Glencraig, Crosshill, Lochore and Ballingry. It has a population of 5,710. It features high levels of deprivation – most of the community council area is SIMD decile 1 or 2. There is a particularly high proportion of social rented housing in the area – 45.6% compared to the Scottish average of 20%; and 24% of the population suffer income deprivation (according to the Local Place Plan). It has a very active local community, with many community groups and events organised, centred around Benarty Centre.

Benarty Community Council (BCC) have led preparation of their Local Place Plan, which has been recently completed and launched (23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025). The LPP builds on a strong history of community activity, including Benarty being a Climate Action Town. BCC have been supported in the latter by Architecture & Design Scotland and in the production of their LPP by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. The plan contains numerous references to JEDI issues, including inequitable patterns of surface water flooding, the need for inclusive growth (including re jobs and homes) and the desire to empower communities.



This is a very deprived area, with one or two local individuals seemingly being key to the production of the LPP. The coming months will be interesting to explore how the LPP is being implemented, with a range of groups being brought in to take responsibility for that implementation.

## 3.3 Wales

Planning is a devolved issue in Wales, but the planning system is an assemblage of legislative material produced before and after devolution. Place Plans can be seen as the Welsh equivalent to Neighbourhood Plans in England, although with several key distinctions. Place Plans are one tool among several in Wales available to pursue community planning activity, but to date are the most

comprehensive (Welsh Government now requires each local authority across Wales to develop Place-Making Plans to set out how they will identify, plan and deliver place making in each of their town centres, and it is expected that this activity may crowd out Place Plans in future).

Planning Policy Wales describes Place Plans as a collaborative tool to promote placemaking and well-being, and influence development and design choices to ensure they are suitable for the local context. Place Plans can cover a single village all the way up to a Town and Community Council (TCC) area and can be initiated by TCCs, the local authority, local community groups, or individual members of the community. Place Plans are non-statutory and do not form part of the development plan. They can be adopted as supplementary planning guidance (SPG) and therefore are designed to advise and assist the delivery of the local development plan (LDP). As SPG, Place Plans cannot introduce new policy but should be linked to the relevant LDP and should focus on land use and development related topics. Place Plans can identify local development sites but not allocate them nor set out the type, scale and quantum of new development. They must be tied to a policy in the LDP, on which they provide further guidance.

#### **i. Bay of Colwyn, Conwy**

The Bay of Colwyn has a population of around 29,000. The town has a notably active civic core, strong natural resources including beaches and woodland, and retains architectural interest as a once popular Victorian tourist destination. Colwyn has a town is marked by pockets of high levels of deprivation and sits in the 20% WIMD most deprived of areas in Wales.

The Bay of Colwyn Place Plan (see image below) was produced last year with significant support from Planning Aid Wales, the Bay of Colwyn Town Council and the planning team at Conwy County Borough Council. The plan was officially adopted by the Bay of Colwyn Town Council on 22 January 2024. The plan is not currently adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the LPA, Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC), but the community is currently working towards this with the council. CCBC are currently working on a replacement Local Development Plan. The replacement plan is currently at Deposit Stage and when adopted it will replace the existing plan adopted in 2013. In late 2024, the Bay of Colwyn Town Council appointed a new Place Plan Manager who is working on the plan's implementation and overseeing various projects that have emerged from the plan, and Place Plan working groups have recently been restarted.





The plan itself is comprehensive and professionally produced. It focuses on six key themes: Housing & Development, ensuring affordable, sustainable housing and repurposing vacant buildings; Culture, Heritage & Tourism, celebrating local identity, improving cultural facilities, and enhancing the tourism offer; Facilities, Assets, Health & Well-being, strengthening community spaces, recreational services, and healthcare access; Transport & Connectivity, promoting active travel, public transport, and infrastructure improvements; Environmental Sustainability, protecting green spaces, enhancing biodiversity, and addressing climate change; and Business & Economy, supporting local businesses, revitalising retail areas, and fostering skills development.

The experience to date show suggests this case study may prove to be a best-in-class example of how to go about community-led planning in the current environment in Wales. The community has benefitted from a strong civic core and large population to draw on (for example, a recent working group meeting had over 50 residents in attendance over two days), as well as significant institutional support locally from Town Council, regionally from the County Borough Council, and from national bodies such as PAW. As the Place Plan itself is at implementation stage, the case will prove useful in exploring how communities can deliver on ambitious local priorities.

## ii. Rhyl, Denbighshire

Rhyl has a population of around 27,000. Like Colwyn, it contains some of the most deprived areas in Wales according to the Welsh IMD and shares some similar characteristics in terms of local natural resources and a similar built environment. Rhyl produced a Town & Area Plan 2014 but since then there not been significant community-led planning activity. The plan is subtitled *Looking forward together 2014-2020* and sets out a vision for revitalising the town by addressing socio-economic challenges, improving infrastructure, and enhancing community well-being. Developed by Denbighshire County Council in partnership with local stakeholders, it acknowledges Rhyl's historical reliance on tourism and the need for economic diversification. The plan prioritises town

centre regeneration, improved transport links, investment in maritime industries, and better access to employment opportunities. It also focuses on enhancing public spaces, redeveloping vacant properties, and strengthening community infrastructure, including education and healthcare. By leveraging Rhyl's coastal assets and implementing targeted interventions, the plan aims to create a more attractive, economically resilient, and vibrant town, with regular reviews ensuring adaptability to evolving needs.

Planning activity in the town is currently dominated by two significant issues. First, Denbighshire County Council, have started working on a replacement Local Development Plan and the Deposit Plan is currently in development. When adopted it will replace the existing plan adopted in 2013. Second, in September 2023, the UK Government launched the Long-Term Plan for Towns initiative as part of its "levelling up" programme. In March 2024, it was announced that Rhyl would receive around £20m as one of the second tranche of towns to be included in the initiative. Around £12m of this sum is allocated from improvement projects in the town centre and central promenade. On going regeneration work is likely to be shaped by Denbighshire County Council's 'Rhyl Vision' scheme and a widely shared belief that reigniting the town's tourist attractions is the key to a successful future. At present, local concerns are centred on ongoing issues of anti-social behaviour amongst younger age groups and the presence of several gypsy and traveller sites around Rhyl.

### 3.4 Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland (NI) there is no planning mechanism that can truly be viewed as community-led, however after the 2014 local government reforms a system of Community Plans (at local authority scale) and Place Plans (broadly small town or ward level) were adopted. The Place Plans provide the entry point for the research, even though they reflect a more traditional 'partnership' model led by the relevant local authority. Beyond this prior to this policy tool, and still operating are, Neighbourhood Renewal Areas targeting funding to the most deprived areas in NI but without any clear or required approach to community planning.

Only a few areas had managed to complete any Place Plans as of Spring 2025 but both of our cases have NRA status (or partly so) and one has a Place Plan (Armagh), while the Belfast area (Colin) expects the local authority to begin work on Place Plans soon.

Given the lack of community-led forms, the work in the NI cases approaches hyper-local planning by asking how the current planning environment reflects their own issues and priorities, using existing documents and processes such as the NRA and the Place Plan mechanism as an initial reference point.

### **i. Callanbridge / West Armagh (Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon District)**

Armagh is a small city of 15,000 population. The western part of the City is designated as a Neighbourhood Renewal Area centring on Callanbridge and is ranked as the 61<sup>st</sup> / 890 most deprived SOAs in Northern Ireland. The NRA includes the housing estates of Callanbridge, Mullacreevie, Drumarg, St Patrick's Park, Callan Street, Railway Street and Drumbreda. The local actors operating in West Armagh state that the tight boundary of the NRA does not really reflect the area that they recognise, and the West Armagh Consortium operates on a broader basis across the Western part of the City - covering an estimated 5,500 population. The areas captured in this wider neighbourhood area were historically mainly catholic. More information is available here: [Armagh profile](#)

Armagh is located towards the southern border of NI, and quite close to the border with the Republic of Ireland. It has a long history and boasts two cathedrals, yet despite its location and historical position it does not have a rail service. Since the end of the troubles there has been greater integration of communities as new developments have been constructed.

Armagh has a Place Plan completed in 2022 which aims to cover the whole city. The Place Plan appears to have relatively low recognition in the West Armagh area based on early interviews. The LDP for the District was part adopted in 2022. Alongside this the NRA has its own strategy and focus, and Callanbridge NRA is oriented to highlight and address the social and economic inequalities which characterise the most deprived areas; and to 'work in partnership with communities to identify and prioritise needs and co-ordinate interventions designed to address the underlying causes of poverty'.



To take forward the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme, the West Armagh Partnership was set up in 2006. Callan Bridge NRA states that the partnership vision (2017) embraced six aspects:

- Living in affordable good quality housing
- Having access to suitable education, training and employment opportunities
- Having access to high standards of health care



- Enjoying a range of cultural, social, leisure and recreational pursuits
- Having access to a variety of appropriate community facilities
- Enjoying the full range of civil liberties

The area clearly has a lot of community action and an active VCS with small groups who run support groups, activities and, along with the Neighbourhood Partnership Board set up in 2006, a 3<sup>rd</sup> sector Consortium (WAC) operates as an advice and support facility to help with training, bidding for grants and operating a community facility for events and activities. Issues cited include anti-social behaviour and low income. It appears that input to the Place plan or the LDP have been quite a low priority, yet when early interviewees have been asked to look at the Place Plan they have observed that it does not really reflect needs and issues that West Armagh faces.

## ii. Colin, West Belfast (Belfast City Council)

The Colin area is in part covered by a NRA, which has existed since 2005 and overseen by the West Belfast Partnership. Additionally, there is the Colin Neighbourhood Partnership (CNP) set up in 2002. The neighbourhood renewal area comprises much of the areas of Poleglass, Lagmore, Twinbrook and Kilwee which together have a combined population of around 25,000. The New Colin area NRA, formally covers a smaller population of around 19,000 with the 20th, 26th and 63rd / 890 most deprived of SOAs in Northern Ireland. More information is available here: [Colin profile](#)

Notably the Colin area was part of Lisburn City Council until local government reorganisation in 2014, with a legacy of perceived unfairness in treatment felt by the Catholic dominated Colin area. In terms of policy for the area and for planning, the situation is somewhat in flux. Belfast City are due to commence Place Plans for the capital, according to the 2024 Belfast Agenda (the Community Plan). The LDP for Belfast is in final stages of production, and there is a review of the NRA strategy commenced in Summer 2024. The 2003 NRA strategy invokes justice and argues that:

*“While the Colin community showed clear signs of social stress, much of which was directed at car thieves, local ‘hoods’, and increasingly drug dealers. While many statutory, voluntary, and community organisations worked tirelessly in addressing these issues, there was growing frustration at the breadth and depth of the problems. There was a recognition that these efforts were primarily addressing the symptoms and not the causes” (CNP, 2003, p.14)*

The themes of the CNP strategy relate to employment, health and familiar topics. However, in the instance of unemployment the CNP state:

*“Unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment is a blight on many disadvantaged communities. It is closely associated with other broader social issues which impact disadvantaged*

*communities i.e., anti-social behaviour, and crime. For the most part, finding a job is a route out of poverty". (CNP, 2003, p11)*

The area is largely residential low density with a large proportion of social housing. Since the 1970s when significant parts of the area were developed the layout was informed by security priorities which means the area is low density with large open areas. It has been claimed that the area has lacked recent story community infrastructure, and sense of identity including a core, with a lack of retail or service centre to help with that.



The area lacks cohesion and has a legacy which remains due to the conflict-influenced design of the wider neighbourhood. This is low density social housing spread out with pockets of greenspaces. In response to this issue a Colin town centre masterplan was commissioned and produced by consultants in 2015. The local community activists have had some success with what they term 'direct action' that is largely lobbying local politicians on a piecemeal basis. They cite success in protecting some greenspace, in lobbying for playground infrastructure and preventing unwanted development.

#### 4. Conclusion/ Synthesis

Here we distil the work so far and explain how the research will progress in the cases across the UK. The project spans four countries, who deploy significantly different forms of community-led planning. These position communities as lead partner, or as one of many, or indeed as a mere consultee group. This means that the approach taken for each nation will be adjusted to ensure we address the aims and research questions of the project in the light of such circumstances.

The selection of the neighbourhoods to work with has already shown quite how different the contexts are, and how this effects process and outcome. The set of neighbourhood areas that we are exploring are also quite diverse by choice. In England, two are located in inner city Middlesbrough and two are ex-mining towns located on the outside of Doncaster. Although there are similar levels

of deprivation and types of poverty experienced, the context and spatial challenges differ and one in each area has pursued a formal neighbourhood plan while the other has not.

The experience of planning matters or local community action clearly varies. In Scotland one of the cases is also a former mining area, who have produced a local place plan, while the other – in Glasgow – is using open space as the means to open-up discussions about the area and its future. The Welsh examples are both coastal towns with long-run socio-economic stresses and a history of interventions. Both have been subject to different forms of very local scale plans and strategies, one more recently, one in 2014. Crucially, in the case of Rhyl which does not have a recent CLP, national government has looked to invest significant funding in a way that will significantly shape the nature of community inputs. In NI, a more urban and more rural context is embraced in Belfast and Armagh, both carry a legacy of the troubles and sectarianism which still has some impact on attitudes, policy design, and organisational behaviours.

If we did not already realise it, the early work in the cases study areas has highlighted that local situations are dynamic, with internal and external factors shifting, with funding, relations, and timing of local action and opportunities to engage in community-led planning changing. The legacy of past action or intervention, the way the priorities have been identified and pursued, and of course how questions of justice can be discerned form core aspects of interest for us.

These questions are sure to feature as part of the story of each neighbourhood as we progress and external dynamics are likely to be having some impact on behaviour and possibly on what actions or issues are tackled (cf. Dijkstra, 2024). As we go forwards, we will also be identifying common themes and experiences amidst the significantly differing contexts, to find points of connection or commonality that can be assessed and used to develop lessons that apply more broadly. What we hope to contribute is not only the story of each area but how public policy and support can be realigned in a way that keeps deeper the questions embraced by our *JEDI* perspective in view (see WP #1-3). In short, we are asking: how are issues recognised and registered, and if not, why not? What means of voicing and pursuing issues are manifest? What is the role of support partners and local government in enabling shaping or indeed frustrating local ambitions or priorities?

This is the final working paper for Just Neighbourhoods. As the project moves towards its later stages, we will also be producing formal published output derived from the work above (and the material already set out in the first three working papers) and we plan to hold an end of project symposium in early 2026. More information on these will be available via our website in due course: [Just Neighbourhoods?](#)

## 5. References

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