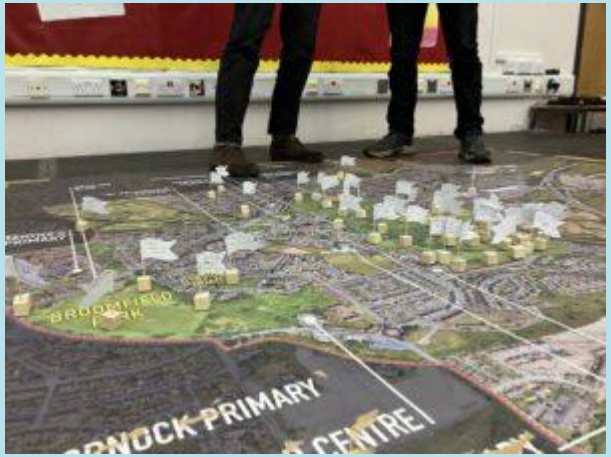
Just Neighbourhoods? Under-representation in UK community-led planning

Insight workshop

ENGLAND | WALES | SCOTLAND | NORTHERN IRELAND

21st January 2026



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Just Neighbourhoods?

University of Reading

University of Hertfordshire UH

Cardiff University
Prifysgol Caerdydd

Agenda

Just Neighbourhoods?

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- Introductions
- Session purposes
- Past and present policy research and context
- Emerging findings
  - Nationally
  - Overall
- Open discussion

Welcome / Intros

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Introductions

- Research team:
  - **Gavin Parker (UoR)**
  - **Tessa Lynn (UoR)**
  - **John Sturzaker (Herts)**
  - **Matt Wargent (Cardiff)**

- Participants – welcome!

- Time will pass quickly, so….

Scope / Purpose

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- Explain the JN project purposes
- Share (some of the) findings
- Capture your experiences
- Discuss how you may use the work

The insight session from Just Neighbourhoods will share findings about community planning in deprived neighbourhoods and will be helpful for practitioners to hear about what the project has identified, provide an opportunity to share the experience and hear back from those in the field.

Advocacy / Intermediary orgs in Planning (and social justice)

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- Challenging times – working in part to others' agendas?
- Era of 'dealmaking' in planning
- 'Making the best of it'?
- Resources
- Foci? Keep social pillar in sight
- Failed governance?
- Purpose / Need and the 'Planning Aid Family' - effective lobby?

'planning has become increasingly disconnected from a key founding objective of the planning movement, namely to secure greater social equity' (TCPA, 2013, p.3)

Advocacy / Intermediary orgs in Planning

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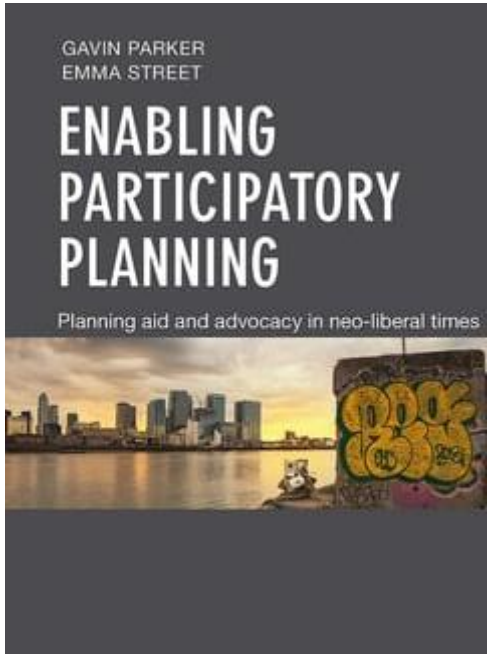
- Noble antecedence?

"[unless] communities [which] lack resources, knowledge and, political power…are given assistance, the effect of planning decisions can be highly regressive" (Amos, 1971, p.397)

- Research highlights the need to raise the issue and lobby?!



Insight on recent government thinking on neighbourhoods

- Context of Pride in Place programe x339 areas UK
- Less support for NP (England) / 'Town boards'
- Civil Society Covenant
- ...BUT 'growth, growth, growth' and participation?
- And 'development viability' / developer power

- Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill - amongst the provisions for the devolution agenda includes a clause that all areas (of England) should have 'effective neighbourhood governance'...

- NI review – People and Place – more joined-up approach...

- ICON Commission (final report next week)

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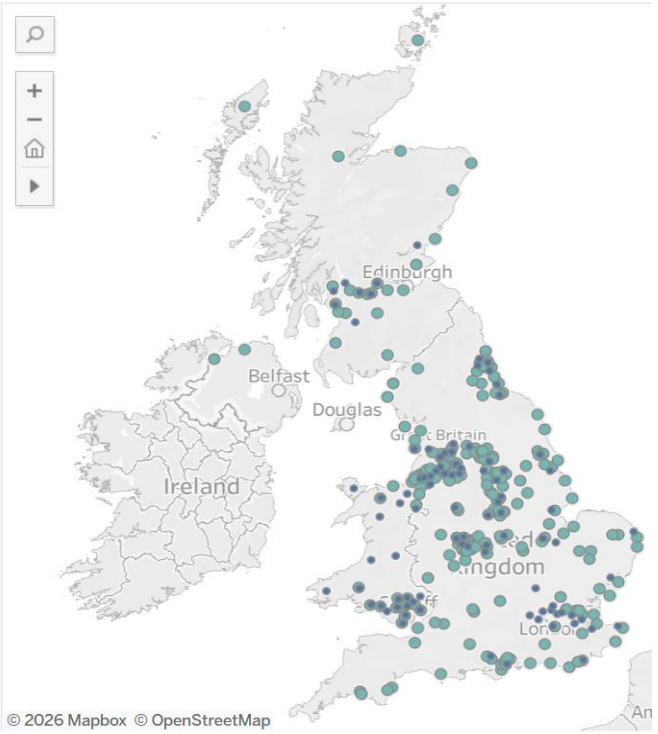
Pride In Place Funding Allocations (13/10/2025)



Overview: Past & Present Research

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Neighbourhood planning / CLP

- English experience in top-20% IMD
  - Low take-up
  - Limited (but notable exceptions) engagement with justice (social / spatial) - indirect
  - Long history of wider community planning – less CLP
  - Scotland / Wales less research on PPs / LPPs

JN project

- Literature review – 9 facets (below)
- Issue of how addressed, issues in view?
- Theory base - 'everyday justice'

- See Website (resources) and PP&R paper

> **"the impression that local government officials are not aware of or interested in identifying vulnerable populations, even though they exist in even generally affluent areas"** (Loh and Kim, 2021, p.190).

JN Findings 1 - Lit Review

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Review findings

- **500 items reviewed across academic literature**

The country-by-country oriented assessments of the literature on CLP indicate a set of common issues.

- illlustrates the relative dearth of research on recent or current CLP initiatives beyond England.
- Each country has its own experience of attempts to develop forms of participation in planning, few could be regarded as ‘community-led' in the tighter sense of that label.
- Experience has been that past CLP (broadly defined) practice, even if targetted on more disadvantaged areas, has attracted criticism from researchers.
- Newer tools e.g. Place Plans, Local Place Plans, Community Plans) have not been fully examined in practice across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland,

Focus to probe more deeply into how the NDP tool,or other efforts have been mobilised in so-called ‘left behind’ areas / IMD top quintile…

- **9 main themes of lit…**

Literature Theme (x9)	Key terms
1. *Leadership, motivation and actors*	Leadership from within places; History (legacy) and context/setting; Motivation; skills (navigation of situation); capacities; information; facilitation; knowledge and ability; endogenous leadership; certainty/trust; place attachment; change agents.
2. *Resources / capacity / knowledge / time and support*	Capacity(uneven); communication(skills); facilitation; institutional design; technology; Partnerships; time inputs (and calibration to group/interest); Support; constraints; relationships; targeted/ /specific resources; social capital; assembly of resources needed.
3. *Co-production*	Scope/control; trust; motives; private sector; joint visioning; outcome focus; conflict management; inclusion
4. *Tools, frameworks, technologies*	Mobilisation(social); support; flexibility; degrees of control; fit to purpose / gap identification; non-profit/intermediary-actors; community enterprise; context/setting (impact of); visualisation/photos; role of arts; visioning; backcasting; participatory budgeting; gentrification (danger of); Outcome orientation; intermediaries (e.g. tech); data tools; limits of tech; ongoing engagement (open); living labs.
5. *Just Planning / Justice*	Justice as central tenet/value; accountability; control; representativeness; power relations; communication (weakness); knowledge development as empowerment; social innovation; rules to support inclusion; right to the city (and see WP1a – Theoretical frame)
6. *Priorities and scope (inc. participant types)*	Funding parameters; groups differential knowledge/understanding (and priorities); use of tech and minorities; facilitation; legal constraints; youth; social barriers
7. *Politics*	Co-option; intra-community division; state roles; paternalism; identities; priorities
8. *Power*	Motives of instigators; knowledge claims and validation; Definition and imperfect representation; Contexts/settings; engagement between stakeholders; Format of participation; dangers of post-politicisation (and see WP1a - Theoretical frame)
9. *Community assets and participation*	Scope of participation; imperfection; assets as focal points; Social infrastructure; property-led regeneration; rights; public institutions

JN Findings 2 - Plan Review

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Plan Content Review findings

- **107 Plans reviewed across nations** (deprived areas selected, plus all NDPs in top quintile IMD) - applied 'JEDI' framework
- See Planning Practice and Research paper 2025

What the review tells us:

- Few plans explicitly reference justice concepts, but most address related challenges.
- Communities often link spatial and social justice, framing local access issues as solutions to broader social problems.
- There is a tendency to focus on positive future outcomes rather than acknowledging overall deprivation.
- The desire for improved community facilities reflects the impact of austerity measures.

This part of the research underscores the importance of understanding community perspectives on justice to inform policy and action.

Paper is open access

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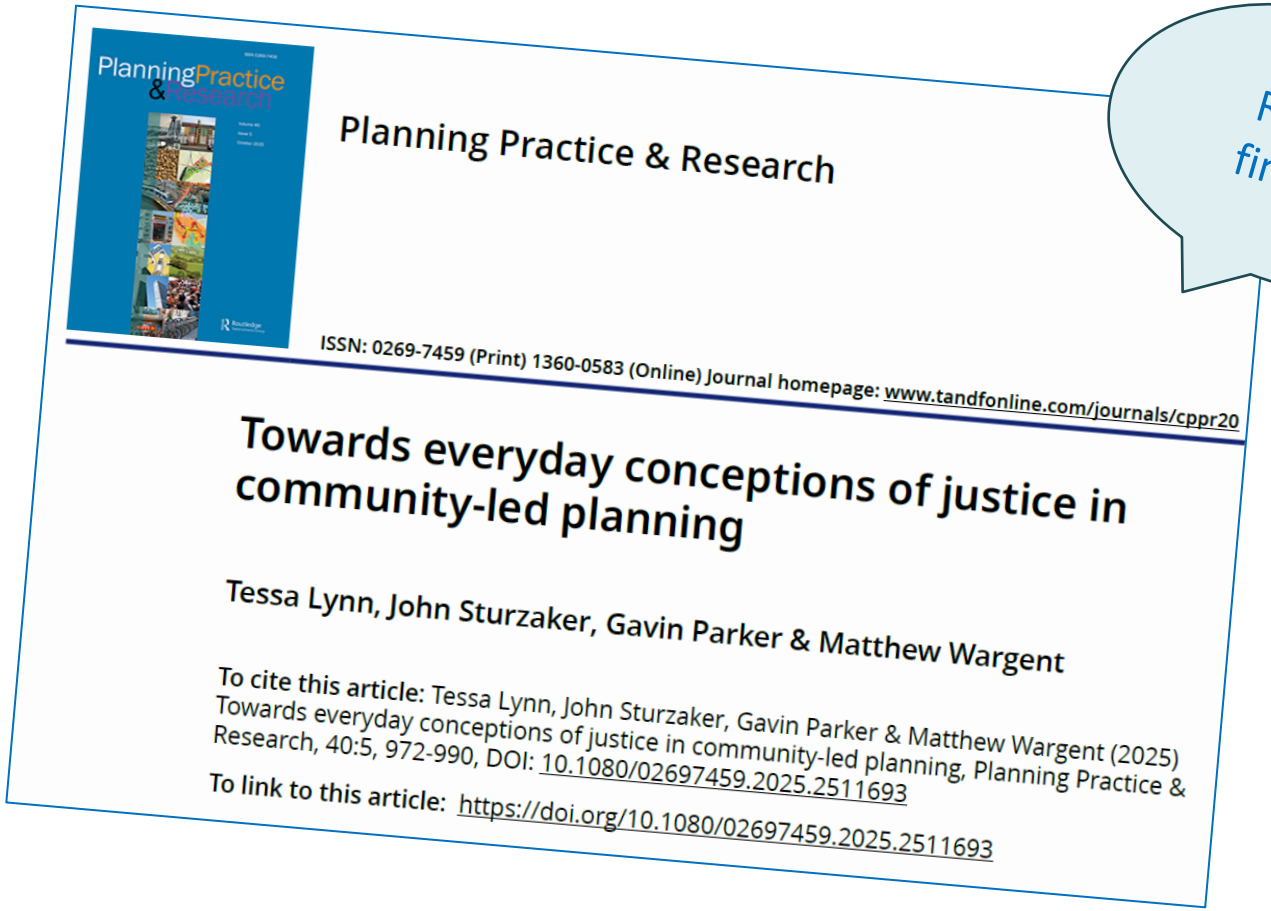

Review findings

JN Findings – Case Studies

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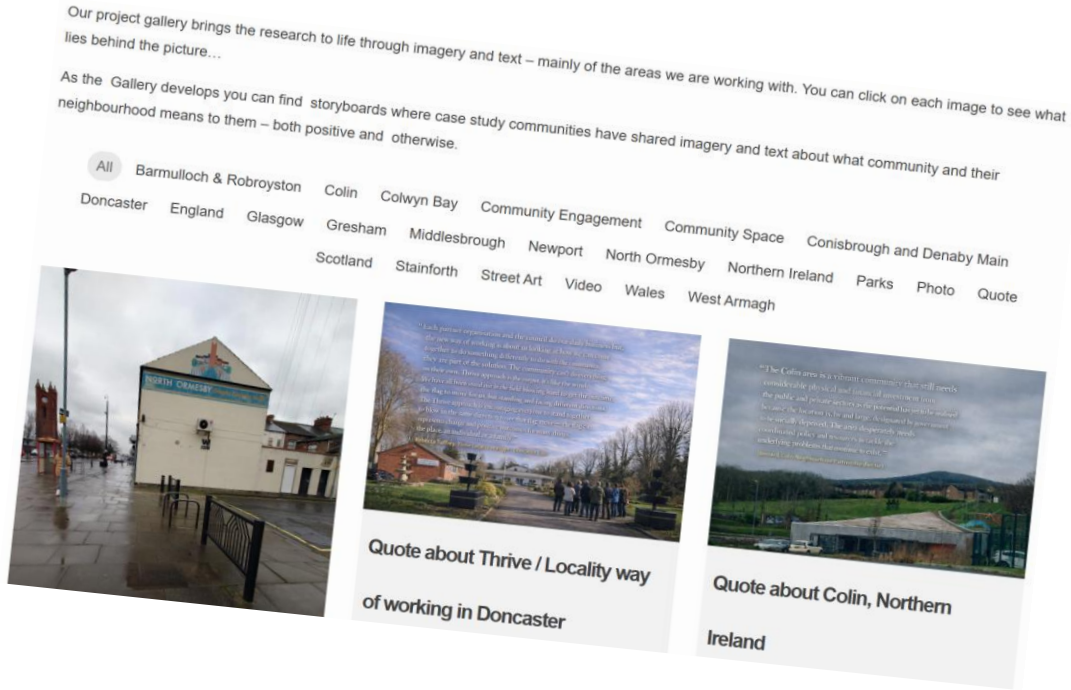
Cases x10 across UK - EMERGING FINDINGS…

- Middlesbrough (Newport + North Ormesby)
- Doncaster (Stainforth + Conisbrough & Denaby Main)
- Benarty, Fife / Robroyston, Glasgow
- Rhyl / Colwyn
- West Armagh / Colin, Belfast



JN Emerging Findings 3 - Cases

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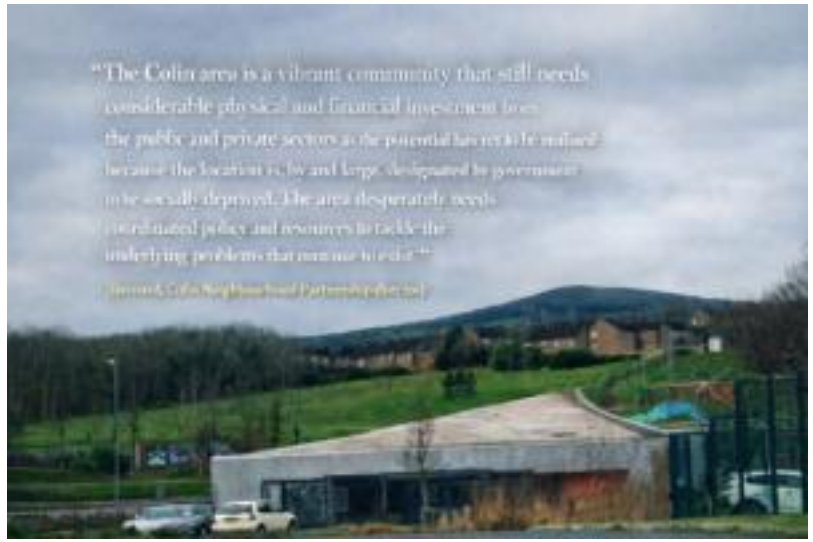
Key themes

- Each case has a write-up of c7,000 words each
- Final report (draft) contains summaries

Overview

- Limited engagement with JEDI
- Fragmented acknowledgment of related policy objs eg social / affordable housing
- Need for support / facilitation
- Need for inscription and follow-up
- Vertical+ horizontal integration



JN Findings 3 – Case studies A

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England – Summary

- Justice, equity, diversity and inclusion as drivers, not outcomes
- Few plans explicitly deploy JEDI terminology

- Communities have limited influence despite formal tools
- Community knowledge versus institutional power

- Relational capacity as a structural challenge
- The importance and limits of intermediaries

- Politics over planning
- Stigma / blight as injustice

Stainforth Neighbourhood Plan

JN Findings 3 – Case studies B

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Scotland - summary

- lessons from the Scotland work are that, given a framework and support, communities are keen to take action to address their own needs
- Case studies interviewee see things on their terms, addressing concerns that they identify
- LPPs seen as an essential step in addressing issues, importantly, **only** a step
- key actors involved in LPP production recognise that "the hard work starts now".
- the plans that are being produced can be viewed as community-led, yet take-up is limited and resources are limiting.
- LPPs used in discussions with e.g. Fife Council to give the community a stronger voice in decision making around planning and development
- Plans can be an important tool in bidding for funding.

In terms of social justice there is little engagement in direct terms – instead related objective of improving quality of life was a driver.

JN Findings 3 – Case studies C

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Wales - Summary

- **Strong influence of local government in community-led planning in Wales** - (and conduit for national funding)

- **Professionalisation is a double-edged sword** - external funding and county-led plan-making have produced polished strategies (aligned with national frameworks)
- tended to **privilege physical regeneration** and external confidence-building over every day social needs (as articulated by residents).

- **Tension between tourism-led visions and post-tourism realities** - particular issue in 'left-behind' coastal communities: pursue aspirational/destination arc, reorient towards resilience/local needs, or a diversified economy

- Coastal regeneration (as a form of climate adaptation) shows how **environmental decisions can reproduce inequality** – investment in beaches, promenades, and waterfronts - such work has not been linked-up with priorities in 'community-led' plans.

JN Findings 3 – Case studies D

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Northern Ireland - Summary

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- Mixed picture of community roles in NRAs (20+ years)
- Policy flux – shift towards greater 'place-based policy'

- Place plans not community-led or co-produced
- PP in West Armagh - limited community recognition

- Scale issue – plans not truly at 'neighbourhood' scale
- Some recognition of social justice / deprivation - limited linkage to formal Plans

JN Emerging Findings 3 - Cases

Just Neighbourhoods?

Case snapshots – England: Middlesbrough

i.Gresham (Newport ward)

- Profile – Population 8,500. 36th most deprived ward in the country (2019). Part of the ward is one of most deprived 100 LSOAs on each Index of IMD since 2004.
- Attempted full neighbourhood plan, completed a Neighbourhood Priority Statement (April 2023)

ii. North Ormesby

- Profile – Population 6,250. Ranked 3rd most deprived ward / top 1% most deprived in England.
- No neighbourhood plan, a Big Local project area until Dec 2024.

JN Findings 3 – Case studies

Just Neighbourhoods?

Case snapshots – England: Doncaster

iii. Stainforth

- Profile – Population 6,300. 2.5% most deprived IMD
- Stainforth Neighbourhood plan approved November 2024. Shaping Stainforth.
- Designated as a regeneration area.

iv. Conisbrough and Denaby Main

- Profile – Population 7,042. 1% most deprived in England IMD
- No neighbourhood plan.
- One of the most deprived parts of Doncaster and Denaby Main community designated as a regeneration area,
- Part of a 'new way of working ' with Doncaster Council.

JN Findings 3 – Case studies

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Case snapshots – Scotland

Barmulloch & Robroyston, Glasgow

- Profile – Population (of ward): 26,000. Much of the area in top 20% SIMD, significant parts in top 10%.
- Plan (focused on multifunctional green spaces) completion Spring 2025

Benarty, Fife

- Profile – Population of 5,700. Most of the area is top 10% or 20% SIMD. Ex-mining communities
- Local Place Plan completed and submitted to Fife Council, implementation now underway

JN Findings 3 – Case studies

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Case snapshots – Wales

Colwyn Bay, Conwy

- Profile - WIMD most deprived 20%, Colwyn pop. 29,000
- Plan Status: Place Plan 2024 (Place Plan Manager app 2024); Replacement LDP

Rhyl, Denbighshire

- Profile: WIMD Rhyl West 1 and 2 the most deprived small areas in Wales, all Rhyl pop. 27,000
- Plan status: Town & Area Plan 2014; ongoing regeneration work (Transforming Towns Grant); Replacement LDP

JN Findings 3 – Case studies

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Case snapshots – Northern Ireland

Callanbridge, West Armagh (Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon District)

- Part NRA, pop. 3,000 (NRA); wider area 5,000 (15,000 all Armagh), 61st/ 890 most deprived LSOA in NI
- Place Plan 2022, LDP part adopted 2022
- Neighbourhood renewal areas since 2003

Colin, West Belfast

- Part NRA, pop. 19,000 (all Colin), with 20th, 26th and 63rd / 890 most deprived LSOAs in NI
- Place Plan about to start??, LDP in final stages, reviewed NRA strategy 2025

JN Reflections / Discussion

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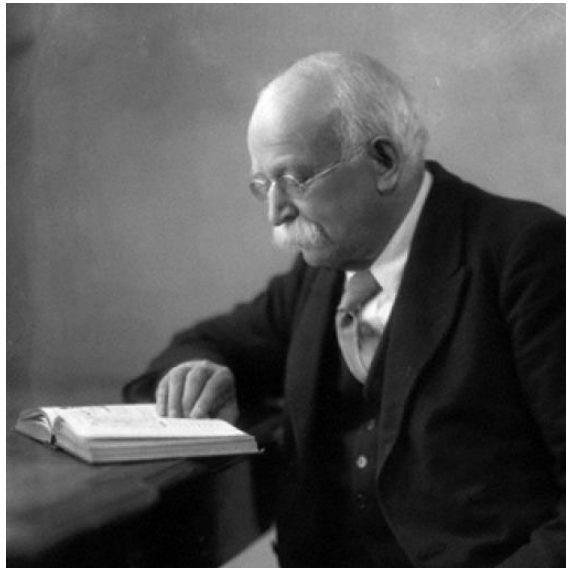
Themes and issues

- Guess you know there is a challenge?!
- Support of PA orgs highly valued
- Advocacy planning / neo-advocacy – steering ALL parties?
- How 'could' you promote social justice in planning? Do you?
- What do make of the 'place-based' approach?
- Recognise and inscribe?
- Issues of resources and staff / volunteer mix

- Discussion:
  - Response
  - Challenges
  - Further ideas…



JN Reflections / Discussion

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Actions / Suggestions for 'Planning Aid family':

1. Continue and prioritise understanding of planning role, system and related tools / governance amongst more deprived areas
2. Prioritise attention to more deprived areas, target effort and run training for local actors (inc. volunteers)
3. Act as intermediaries across such areas (sharing of info / hosting example policy, plans, etc), and enabling peer learning
4. Assist with policy writing for neighbourhoods / communities
5. Help with understanding the tensions and micro-politics of policy / policymakers - competing priorities etc. (i.e. not only a technical process)
6. Look at greater joint action and development of alternative plan approach – no existing tool is perfect BUT addressing deprivation / justice is possible and existing approaches have merit.
7. Use the JN evidence to help with the above.

Open Discussion

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Policy symposium

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- **5th Feb Policy symposium** – welcome to join online if you (really!) can't make it.

- We will be considering further dissemination events in the Spring… ideas and thoughts welcome.
- via t.j.lynn@henley.reading.ac.uk

MANY THANKS

Project website & media

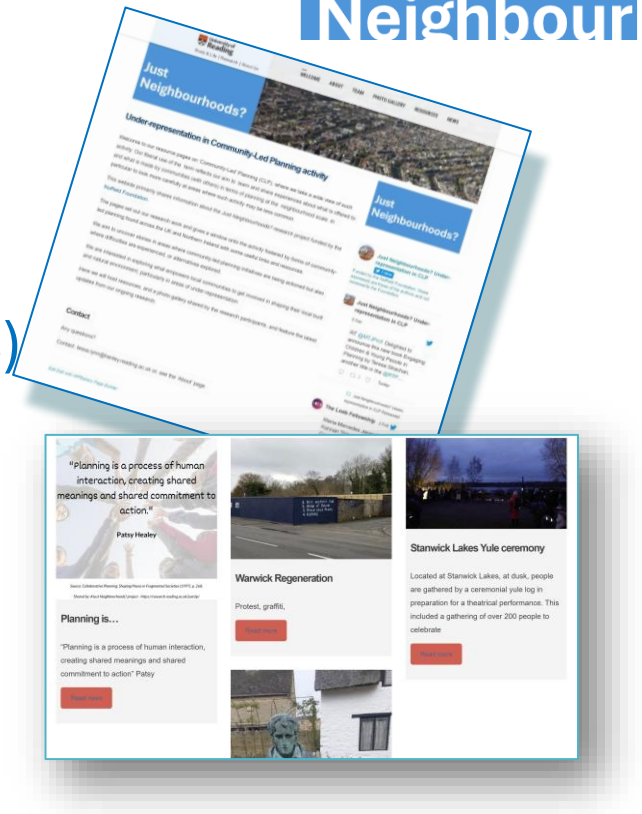
Features:

- Photo and thoughts gallery – ideas welcome
- Resources page (inc. your logos and links)
- Social media:

  Bluesky
  @JustCLP (@justclp.bsky.social)

- Web address:

  research.reading.ac.uk/JustCLP



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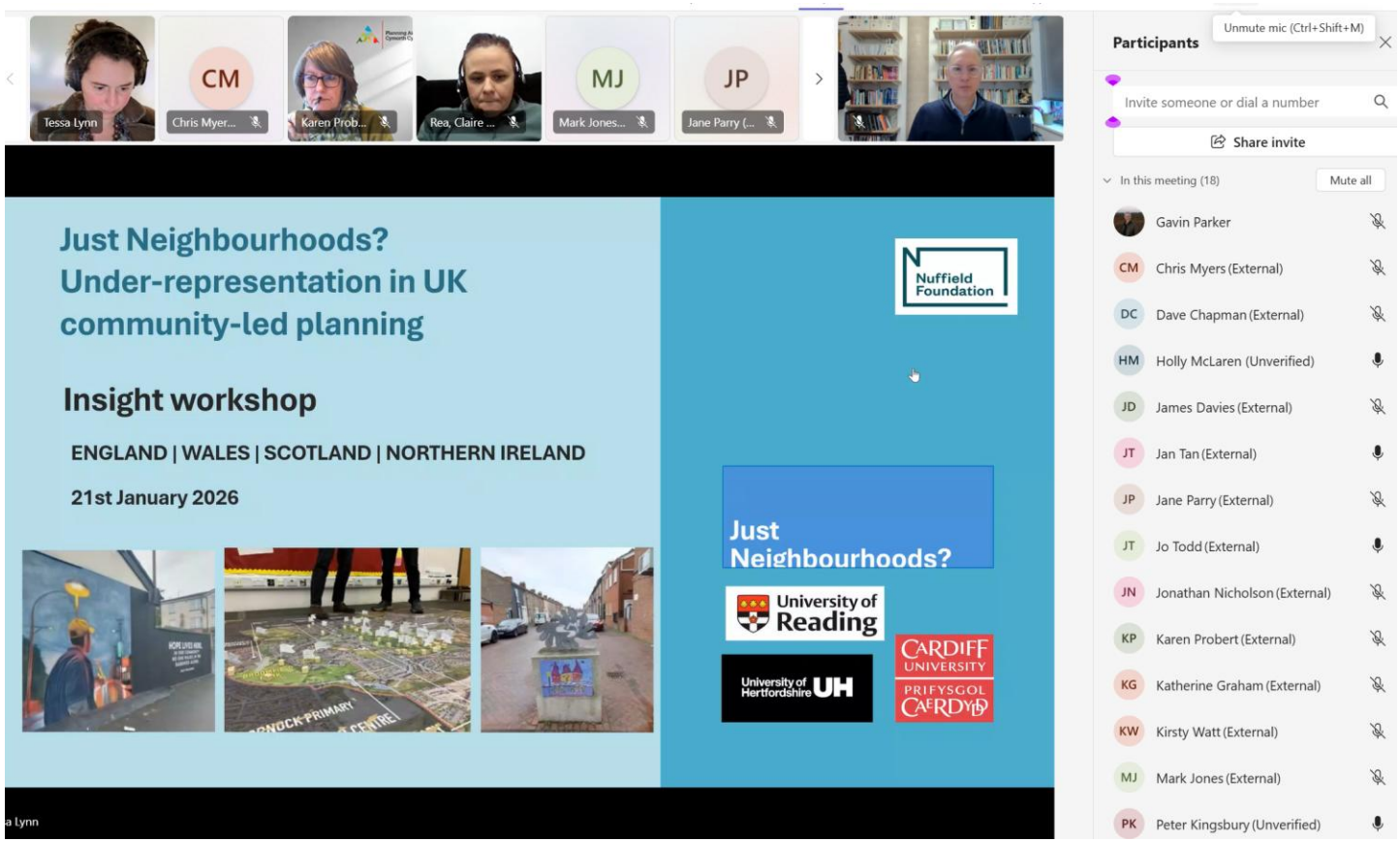
Session image