

***Just Neighbourhoods?***  
**Under-representation in**  
**Community-Led Planning**  
**activity in the UK**

**Final Report**  
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**Prof. Gavin Parker, University of Reading**  
**Dr Tessa Lynn, University of Reading**  
**Prof. John Sturzaker, Hertfordshire University**  
**Dr Matthew Wargent, Cardiff University**



**Just**  
**Neighbourhoods?**

## Just Neighbourhoods?

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## Nuffield Foundation

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds and undertakes rigorous research, encourages innovation and supports the use of sound evidence to inform social and economic policy, and improve people's lives. 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 (WEL/FR-000024064), but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Foundation. Find out more at: [nuffieldfoundation.org](http://nuffieldfoundation.org).

## The research team

The Just JN researchers have been working on neighbourhood scale planning for many years and were responsible for the reviews of neighbourhood planning in England in both 2014 and 2020. The team comprises:

- Professor Gavin Parker, University of Reading (Principal Investigator)
- Dr Tessa Lynn, University of Reading
- Professor John Sturzaker, University of Hertfordshire
- Dr Matthew Wargent, Cardiff University

## Project website and resources

The working papers and other resources, including imagery and materials relating to the case studies, are available to view on the JN project website, which may be accessed at: <https://research.reading.ac.uk/justclp/>.

## Executive summary

The report presents the findings and recommendations of the *Just Neighbourhoods?* research project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation. The project examined how community-led planning (CLP) operates in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the UK, and the extent to which this activity contributes to advancing justice in place-based decision-making.

The report sets out the rationale for the research, the methods employed, key findings, and implications for policy and practice, including recommendations. This is the principal synthesis of the research. A series of supporting working papers and additional materials are available on the project website: <https://research.reading.ac.uk/justclp/>.

### Scope and purpose of the study

The focus of the project was to better understand the experiences of communities under-represented in planning activity, and what factors influence how communities engage with forms of CLP. The research was designed to inform both policy and practice, as well as residents. The research aims were to identify:

- How communities are approached to participate in CLP
- Who does and does not participate in CLP and why
- How the design and practice of CLP shape both the plans produced and their outcomes in terms of local social and environmental justice
- And, to produce research outputs that help communities, practitioners and policymakers have a greater understanding of how CLP can produce more just outcomes

### Research and policy context

The project covered England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and sought to reflect the variety of neighbourhood scale planning tools that exist across the UK nations. The focus was specifically on neighbourhoods ranked highly on the relevant indices of multiple deprivation (IMD). There were several key rationales for this focus:

- A widespread consensus that social justice needs to be addressed in deprived or 'left behind' neighbourhoods
- Many known issues and challenges, both substantive and processual, concerning CLP in deprived areas

- There are significantly different forms of neighbourhood scale planning across the UK, with little research focussing on deprived neighbourhoods
- The current context of policy change and learning, with a refreshed approach to neighbourhoods in the UK emerging, set against a disparate legacy of tools designed to plan more effectively with communities

The research comprised: a synthesis of existing international academic literature relating to community-led planning; a content review of 107 plans across the UK drawn from the top 20% of deprived neighbourhoods (using country level IMD); and an exploration of dynamics and issues on the ground within ten case study areas from across the UK, drawing on around 160 interviews plus meetings, visits and documentary reviews.

## Key findings and recommendations summary

### ***Headlines from the literature review***

Nine main areas were distilled from the literature review, providing a clear indication of the types of issues and obstacles recognised. These form a basis for informing improved policy design and operation of planning at the neighbourhood scale and covered questions of *justice, leadership, resources, co-production, processes and tools, community assets, priorities and scope of activity, and questions of power and politics*. The full span of themes and sub-themes provide useful context and pointers for future programme and policy design (see [Annex I](#) of the report).

### ***Key points derived from the plan content coverage***

The research team assessed 107 neighbourhood scale plans conceived under the ‘community-led’ label across the UK, which had been produced in and with areas with significant deprivation. The key points were:

- Virtually all the plans reviewed recognised challenges associated with justice, equity, disadvantage, and inclusion, albeit to varying extents, or with a lack of systemisation
- The assessment showed *indirect* linkage of policy and aspiration which can be tracked back to justice, equity, deprivation, and inclusion themes. Where this occurred, the plans frequently only partly addressed problems or did so in a fragmented way; some prefer to focus on what is perceived to be ‘everyday’ matters that can improve quality of life
- The lack of linkage to known issues of deprivation highlights the need to pursue what we label here ‘inscriptive justice’ - that is: to ensure that important issues are set down and explicitly linked to actions that address these matters

### ***Lessons from the case studies***

The lessons drawn from the study are of particular importance for the constituent UK national governments and for local authorities seeking to improve engagement and co-production of priorities and actions with more deprived neighbourhoods. Our recommendations explicitly highlight who in particular should attend to our findings and suggestions. The ten cases drawn from across the UK help deepen understanding of the actual dynamics and context for CLP activity. These show the contexts of, and efforts to, plan in and with deprived neighbourhoods, alongside the frustrations involved with prevailing tools and institutional arrangements, or reasons for non-engagement. We found that:

- Across the cases, where communities had developed or worked in partnership with local authorities and/or consultants to create neighbourhood scale plans, it was found they are not always seen as a reliable means to achieve goals – past local experience and an urge for speed can partly account for this. Important matters need to be set out clearly rather than avoided or deemed ‘undeliverable’; the approach in Colwyn Bay came closest to this wider aim, and used some innovative methods of engagement, actively involving children and targeting participation
- Recognition of the importance of confronting problems and challenges and identifying who and how to address them is fundamental – even if the plan itself cannot deliver the necessary change – maintaining the visibility of the plan and indicating where, why and when who can assist is necessary
- Plans are often used to influence future development but are not generally viewed as an effective tool to influence ‘everyday’ quality of life; several cases showed this across the nations, notably in Doncaster where particular economic opportunities were prioritised over community-led efforts to pursue renewal via initiatives conceived via CLP
- There was frustration over ‘decisions from above’ which appear to contradict community interest even where hyper-local action or priorities are established; there is a need for better recognition by government and local authorities that poorly planned or coordinated projects can make a situation worse. Relatedly, ensuring co-ownership of problems and solutions needs attention, as does more consistent arrangements that sustain deliberation of alternatives to develop a shared vision
- Support and facilitation are highly valued by local residents – but there remain questions over who pays (and the fairness of ‘one offs’ with particular neighbourhoods) – which can influence the basis and scope of the activity. This indicates that commissioning and the basis or terms of reference for such activity needs attention; those commissioning or holding budgets need to be accountable at the inception stage

## Overall conclusions

Our conclusions range from promoting the unfulfilled potential of effective planning at scale, to the need to more overtly address social and spatial justice in plans, and moreover, to inscribe those matters explicitly – linking plans to actions.

The research highlights the mixed picture of how CLP lacks clear terms of reference for effective co-production and implementation. When focussing on deprived areas, there is a need to review existing planning tools and confront questions of local politics and power imbalances. The research shows how fragmented planning is at neighbourhood scale, and how easily community interests can be undermined or overlooked in deprived areas – not least when effective community engagement is translated into action. Decisions and actions taken without greater community co-ownership can be profoundly felt, causing harm to governance relations, the social fabric, and trust.

This points to a need for neighbourhood scale planning to have greater status, and institutional actors should demonstrate how they have responded to community-led plans and their aspirations. The findings and conclusions, set out in the report, led us to shape eight areas of recommendation - aimed largely at national governments as well as local institutions.

## Recommendations for policy and practice audiences

Further explanation of the recommendations is found in the main report, however we set out the eight main recommendations in brief below:

1. Budget holders and those commissioning plans need to **re-examine terms of engagement and scope of hyper-local plans – these should be co-produced and mutually agreed**, not, as is usually the case, imposed by national and local governments. Pre-determining what a plan will cover and how it will be prepared constrains voice from below and can reproduce top-down solutions; this also speaks to a need for greater institutional embeddedness for forms of citizen participation
2. National governments should look at how place planning can be effective in conveying bottom-up knowledges and evidence, reflecting a ‘total place’ approach in which **existing tools** (i.e. Place Plans, Local Place Plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans) **can be usefully amended or repurposed** as hyper-local

planning can develop objectives that are co-produced and help orchestrate actions that are understood and owned by all

3. Community planners – alongside intermediaries and local and national government – should **ensure that the plans inscribe the issues being faced at scale and make clear linkages from issues to policy and on to action**. Clear communication back to communities about how institutional actors can respond should form part of the process. This breaks open a limiting factor of ‘deliverability’ as plans should show what needs to be tackled as well as what is seen as achievable in a shorter frame
4. When formulating and integrating policies relating to local place **National governments should afford greater status to community-led plans** as repositories of aims, issues and priorities that can feed into budget prioritisation as well as be useful for informing many stakeholders (including a wide range of topics from health and policing); at present plans are too often paid lip-service but not fully considered by decision-makers
5. National governments as budget holders should **resource intermediaries** with neutral positioning vis-a-vis institutional actors and community interests, explicitly recognising that communities need (paid for) support in plan-making processes; this builds from experience of organisations such as social enterprise consultancies, who have amassed a great deal of relevant experience and are important facilitators who can act as a bridge between expert and lay actors to provide maximum useability of community-led plans, but are limited by budget capacity
6. Support organisations and local authorities **should recognise that there are community assets and leaders present within communities** and ensure that they are supported to work effectively on both community-led plans and implementation with others; this reflects a recognition of the important role of non-elected, as well as elected, citizens in mobilising the voice of neighbourhood residents and the limits of extensive participation as opposed to those who can maintain community voice through a process

7. Local authorities and other institutional actors engaging with residents as volunteers need to **adopt responsible agency and greater reflective practice**; those tasked with supporting, co-producing or overseeing CLP should be mindful of how their actions affect longer term morale and likely future engagement of residents; clear lines of responsibility and communication are needed to sustain a long-term set of beneficial co-production relations. This could translate to mutually agreed processes and terms of engagement which are fair and equitable, with basic adherence to feedback about how different inputs are used
  
8. Government could **consider trialling special planning and associated institutional arrangements for deprived neighbourhood areas** – for example using Pride in Place neighbourhoods as a launching point. This represents one way forward to ensure that a long-term total place perspective is brought to bear; this should feature mandated CLP in those areas alongside powers and resources to enable prioritised actions. This stems from established practices of intervention in the UK, where regeneration of some areas is deemed necessary via special vehicles (such as Development Corporations). Further work on how a neighbourhood scale zoning could be devised is needed, with a view to shaping these areas as a socio-economic regeneration spaces that feature co-produced plans and priority statements

## 1. Introduction and context

This is the final report of the *Just Neighbourhoods?* project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation. The research aimed to explore how the needs and priorities of deprived neighbourhoods were being reflected in formal planning. The aim was to pay particular attention to planning activities taking place at the neighbourhood scale.

There were several prompts for the work: first, the concern that few areas with higher levels of deprivation had taken up planning tools such as neighbourhood planning in England (Parker *et al.*, 2020; 2023), a tool which was claimed to be ‘community-led’. Second, that in many community-led plans there was a tendency for ‘rescripting’ to occur – this is where professionals edit or otherwise organised plans to conform to others’ expectations or to the limits imposed by national government (Parker *et al.*, 2015). There is a sparsity of research into how such ‘partnership’ working is agreed or whether it can sustain an equitable approach.

The concern to ensure that local policy is guided by public participation remains a strong current in academic and policy debates and in various attempts at planning for place. However, it is apparent that efforts to offer greater control or to develop more equitable co-production practices has been challenging (Albrechts *et al.*, 2019; Andre *et al.*, 2023; Galuska, 2019). For some this really matters. Those living in objectively assessed areas of deprivation are less likely to engage or have their agendas heard or acted upon (Lynn *et al.*, 2025; Sturzaker *et al.*, 2022; Brookfield, 2017; ICON, 2025). Our research highlights the gap between claimed priorities for action and the way in which participation actually shapes policy.

This led us to adopt a justice lens in assessing first plan coverage and content, and subsequently to explore the dynamics within a selection of neighbourhoods that had either completed a community-led plan or had considered such action and not pursued it. A concern that planning has not addressed social justice sufficiently is reflected in what is now the 13 years since the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) produced their report *Planning Out Poverty*. This asserted that the whole planning system needed to reorient towards social justice and for tools such as neighbourhood planning to be targeted towards areas of ‘social exclusion’ (Ellis and Henderson, 2013; see Teitz and Chapple, 2013 for US context).

Some of the claimed benefits of ‘good’ planning include boundary-spanning deliberation across issues and the setting of spatial and temporal priorities. As such, what the inputs are and how

knowledge, evidence and local understanding are used and inscribed is critical to policy legitimacy. They are also part of the ingredients of developing greater local policy and priority ownership and trust and may sustain greater procedural justice credentials. At the same time, the prevailing policy environment has recognised the very local, neighbourhood or hyper-local scale as important (Cowie *et al.*, 2015; ICON/Frontier Economics, 2025).

In this report, we have variously used ‘community planning’ and ‘community-led planning’ to encapsulate a range of tools and processes that are offered or invited (as opposed to ‘invented’ or more ‘bottom up’ planning activity) and which are led or partnered by community actors (see Dillon and Fanning, 2016). Crisp *et al.* (2016, p.4) attempt to define community-led planning as:

*“... activities undertaken by individuals, groups or organisations within defined geographical neighbourhoods in order to achieve social, economic or environmental objectives defined by participants with minimal external control”.*

We have chosen to include formal plans where forms of collaboration or co-production are present or claimed, to allow for a critical assessment of what some have termed the spaces between ‘invited’ and ‘invented’ participation (Bussu, 2019) where citizens are either asked to participate on terms which are pre-set, or alternatively engage on their own terms. Given the above, we maintain a critical view of the label and when ‘community-led’ planning is subsequently used it should be considered a proxy for a range of activity that claims or is specifically set-up to conform to the above definition. We have also maintained a liberal view of the label ‘planning’ to avoid focussing solely on a narrow conception of land use planning and to embrace other forms of agenda setting at the neighbourhood scale. How claims to community-led activity, co-production or more open ideas of partnership transpire in practice is reflected upon towards the end of this report.

The following sections cover the stages of the research starting with the research design and methods (Section 2). We then cover the first stages of research in Section 3. Section 4 provides a summary of the case studies of community-led planning conducted across the UK.

## 2. Research design and scope of the research

The research sought to explore who is represented in ‘community-led’ planning (CLP) spaces, what issues are prioritised, and how these factors impact outcomes. We were interested primarily in how community planners understand social and environmental justice and how this was reflected in their actions. For those communities undertaking CLP, we also wanted to consider how the design, process and practice of CLP initiatives shape such activity.

### 2.1 Aims

Given the above, the research was set-up to explore how communities perceive and address injustices through planning. As such, key questions included understanding community definitions of justice and how priorities are established. Our formal research aims were to identify:

- How communities are approached to participate in CLP
- Who does and does not participate in CLP and why
- How the design and practice of CLP shape both the plans produced and their outcomes in terms of local social and environmental justice
- And, to produce research outputs that help communities, practitioners and policymakers have a greater understanding of how CLP can produce more just outcomes

And therefore, the project was oriented to explore:

- **Understandings of social and environmental justice** among selected communities across the UK (understanding)
- The nature of **representation and inclusivity** within community-led planning (CLP) spaces and its relationship with outcomes (outcome)
- How the **design, process, and practice of CLP** shapes the forms and outcomes of activity (process)
- The **added value CLP** exhibits in relation to social and environmental justice outcomes

## 2.2 Research design and methods

The research design comprised four stages: a structured literature review; a content review of a sample of plans; in-depth case studies selected from across the UK; and workshops and dissemination activity. The first stage involved developing the theoretical framework, alongside conducting the literature review. This work led to the ‘JEDI’ framework (Justice, Equity, Deprivation, Inclusion) that was devised to systematically analyse the content of the plans in the second stage. This involved a sampling exercise to understand where deprived neighbourhoods had been active in forms of CLP across the UK. The sample was then analysed, noting different approaches taken in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, before coding relevant issues and distinguishing between aspirational statements and concrete policies. The mainstay of the primary data collection comprised ten case studies selected from across the UK, where we undertook:

1. **Documentary analysis** - policy, planning and community artefacts pertaining to the neighbourhoods in question
2. **Direct observation** - of community meetings and events
3. **Semi-structured interviews** - with local government officers / place-based support workers / elected members / community members including “leaders”, / non-state professionals (consultants, community development professionals, voluntary sector representatives) amounting to more than 160 interviews

We also developed a neighbourhood record gallery on the project website. That gallery features participant derived output as well as from the research team. This records place experience and participant engagement in the project. It also enabled some participants to find voice through and alongside community imagery, text and poetry.

The final stage was designed to allow workshops with communities and other activities in order to refine and disseminate our findings. The last element has featured an end of project policy symposium and wider dissemination activity, including a series of publications and other outputs.

## 2.3 Theory, literature and conceptual frame

The research project has focused on under-representation in community-led planning and its relationship to concepts of justice, power, scale and questions of deprivation (see Lynn *et al.*,

2025). Framing the work is the wide recognition of the prevalence of persistent and deepening inequalities; and that tools to arrest and tackle this are sorely needed (Lobao and Hooks, 2025; Lloyd *et al.*, 2023). Concerns have been raised about representation, inclusion and accountability, particularly in places where community-led planning has generally been less successful. Moreover, in formal plans in the US, where questions of social justice and equity maintain a high profile, it has been reported 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).

The early review of literature suggested there may be a lack of what we depict here as ‘inscriptive justice’ in hyper-local planning activity. That is, the critical step of actually fashioning issues into policy that reflects the needs and priorities of communities – across and beyond formal land-use planning concerns. This is a crucial and often overlooked step in securing just outcomes; in simple terms the analytical sequence we suggest is: i) recognition of injustice; ii) inscriptive justice (within plans); iii) institutional response and; iv) just outcome(s).

Given the above we provide a short explanation of the relevance of justice here. Justice is a complex concept with roots that emphasise fairness and equity. Key theorists like Harvey, Lake and Marcuse argue for the importance of justice in planning, focusing on distribution of resources and opportunities, while Susan Fainstein (2019, p. 130) has argued that justice should be a key criterion for measuring public policy effectiveness *“if justice becomes the yardstick for measuring public policy effectiveness, then policymakers must ask to what end efficiency applies and who benefits from economic growth”*. This simple assertion acts to question prevailing institutional arrangements and prompts reflection about how just action can be formulated and judged.

Despite widespread acceptance of a need for greater social and environmental justice, the connection between democratising planning and delivering just outcomes remains unclear. Justice can be defined in procedural terms (following legal requirements) or substantive terms (achieving fair outcomes). There is often a focus on procedural justice rather than substantive justice. Prefixes like social, spatial, or environmental justice have become accepted labels, with spatial justice of particular significance here (and in planning more generally), addressing as it

does inequalities in access to resources and opportunities. Moreover, the literature highlights the need for fairer distribution of resources across spaces and scales.

In orienting the research, the work of Lake (2016) and Sen (2009) were drawn upon to emphasise lived experience and specific linked issues over abstract ideals of justice. This approach points toward a need to focus on situated and actionable practices of justice rather than universal definitions. Sen (2009) has criticised the search for a singular notion of justice, advocating for a focus on practical improvements to reduce injustices. In this view justice is seen as a relational and evolving concept, influenced by community engagement and power dynamics. However, a 'just' process does not guarantee just outcomes (Fainstein, 20210) – the success or otherwise of both must be evaluated (Smeds *et al.*, 2023). Following Sen, justice in planning encompasses both process and outcome: requiring a focus on participatory methods and community involvement is essential for achieving equitable planning outcomes; and supportive institutional frameworks are necessary to enhance community knowledge and capacity. Sen's approach also draws attention to the importance of community engagement in identifying and addressing local injustices. Inscriptive justice is commensurate with such a view, grounding the practice of justice in community engagement and shaping it to local context and need.

Recognising existing power distributions is essential for addressing injustices where resources such as knowledge and agency are critical for community empowerment. Communication and relationships with intermediaries play a significant role in community dynamics. Furthermore, contextual factors must be considered in order to understand specific neighbourhood situations. The literature discussing justice and power dynamics has evolved to a point where power is viewed not merely as something that can be given or taken; it is complex and multifaceted. Theories of power include 'power over,' 'power to,' and 'power through,;' each highlighting different aspects of how power influences outcomes and how it operates in different spaces and levels of engagement. Participatory spaces may be distinguished between 'provided,' 'invited,' and 'claimed' spaces, emphasising the need for inclusive decision-making processes. Power distribution is a key determinant of justice in society, particularly in planning practices. Understanding how power operates and is experienced is essential for effective community empowerment and addressing injustices.

Power can be affected by structures, institutions, agency and discourse. Structures and institutions define the rules shaping political, economic, and social interactions. These can both constrain and enable actions and may be resistant to short-term changes. Agency involves

individual actions and collaboration, crucial for effective empowerment. Discourse influences how power relations are organised and understood, including how planning processes and participation are offered, managed, and used.

The local and hyper-local scale is increasingly important in discussions of justice, with a focus on how community-led planning can address local injustices. The project contends that understanding power dynamics at the local level is crucial for effective community-led planning. How we may currently assess the approach to neighbourhood scale planning, from a moral / ethical perspective, and in light of this positioning in terms of justice, is summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Positioning planning and justice for neighbourhoods in ethical terms**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Prime consideration</b>
<b>Teleological</b>	Outcomes/Consequences	<i>"What will produce the best result?" (Utilitarian)</i>
<b>Deontological</b>	Duties/Rules/Intentions	<i>"What is my duty/the rule?" (Kantian)</i>
<b>Virtue</b>	Character/Habits	<i>"What would a good person do?" (Aristotelian)</i>
<b>Rights</b>	Individual Rights	<i>"Does this respect human dignity?" (Lockean)</i>
<b>Justice</b>	Fairness/Equality	<i>"Is this fair to all parties?" (Rawlsian)</i>
<b>Ethics of Responsibility</b>	Situational judgment	<i>Responds to specific context (Weberian)</i>

The above distillation of approaches to justice helps to position current practice ethically and aid a normative debate over what neighbourhood scale planning looks like and should service. Indeed, this also leads to the question of how power dynamics are found in neighbourhood scale planning. The research aims to understand how community-led planning can effectively address issues of justice and power at the hyper-local scale, particularly in areas of objectively observed deprivation. We highlight the necessity of co-produced solutions that consider local conditions and power dynamics to foster meaningful change. We also recognise a need to figure out how neighbourhood scale planning activity and priorities can be used to shape, and consider, planning and policy at local, regional and national levels.

### 3. Key findings I – secondary research

We have organised the following section to present our findings based on the first work package, focussing on the literature themes and its implications, and then a summary of the plan reviews.

#### 3.1 Literature review and themes emerging

The literature review focused on community-led planning (CLP) and under-representation in community governance, and informed the theoretical framework. We synthesised findings from international literature emphasising community governance and planning, published since 2010 to inform the research design.

A systematic approach was taken to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature and a structured search protocol was developed using specific keywords related to community-led planning. The review included over 500 sources, with a focus on synthesising key themes and findings.

The state of research in this area indicates a consistent pattern of barriers across deprived areas, with uneven support from local planning authorities (LPAs). Concerns about the politicisation of voluntary efforts highlight the need for support from LPAs and consultants. The issues that surfaced included leadership, resources, co-production, and community participation. These reflect key aspects discussed by authors over time. The review also reflects how innovative approaches to participation, such as instances of co-production and participatory budgeting, are being explored internationally. This also shows-up a recognition of frequent barriers, including unrealistic expectations regarding communities' ability to self-organise and understand planning processes. Within and across the nine themes we synthesised a collection of key terms which featured (see [Annex I](#)). These groupings should be helpful for policymakers to reflect on how such factors have been recognised, addressed and incorporated in policy design.

The literature supports a normative agenda to orient planning towards justice and inclusivity, and addressing barriers to participation forms part of this. A range of studies indicate that community planning often reproduces existing power inequalities (e.g. Nasca *et al.*, 2019; Laskey and Nicholls, 2019), necessitating a focus on structural justice. Indeed, it may be argued that attention to empowering residents through understanding their power potential can motivate participation and help address inequalities (SMK Foundation, 2022), as well as

encourage policymakers to embed both participatory processes and values of social justice into institutional design.

In terms of relevant policy and planning tools, the literature accounts for efforts to steer formal planning towards social justice and to attend to the hyper-local scale. Notably examples include targeted neighbourhood renewal which has been deployed in waves; from urban programmes in the 1960s to neighbourhood renewal adopted during the Blair administrations in the UK. Such initiatives have focussed on challenging questions of social exclusion and socio-economic disadvantage (see Crisp *et al.*, 2023 for a useful review). However, by 2010 this was largely swept away<sup>1</sup> and in England Neighbourhood Planning (NP) was introduced as a means for communities to exert greater control over local development. The Localism Act (2011) aimed to empower communities, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility. Despite initial enthusiasm, NP faced criticism regarding its effectiveness and inclusivity. Evidence has showed that NP is more ‘successful’ in affluent areas, with less engagement in deprived neighbourhoods (Parker *et al.*, 2020). Across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland experimentation with forms of place planning have also proceeded over the past decade (see [Annexes IV-VII](#)).

As our research highlights, what is actually reflected in such plans only infrequently appears to coincide with the deeper issues faced by communities in those deprived areas. Where they are recognised, issues are often not coordinated or regarded further up the policy hierarchy, and many plans cannot be regarded as the product of genuine co-production or overtly addressing social justice in explicit terms – as we identified in the plan review below.

### 3.2 Plan content review

The plan review was achieved through a qualitative analysis of 107 community scale plans across the UK. Drawing from the theory and literature review, we organised our assessment via a ‘JEDI’ model i.e. *Justice, Equity, Deprivation and Inclusion* (see [Annex II](#)). We examined how neighbourhood scale plans in the UK reflect (or not) local understandings of justice, equity, deprivation and inclusion themes in deprived areas. This showed the uneven and fragmented coverage of such plans when context and known issues were brought in to view. The findings

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<sup>1</sup> In Northern Ireland NRAs have been maintained. Post-2010 locally led approaches were favoured in England while the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in England effectively removed explicit concern for social justice from planning policy (see TCPA, 2013).

highlight how communities interpret and address justice, related issues. While in most places there is a lack of abstract discussions, there is instead some focus on tangible local issues like affordable housing, employment and health.

The plans we reviewed were stronger on identifying the problems, issues and challenges faced by the locality, than they were on specifying deliverable *actions* in relation to the assessment framework - while everyday issues and micro-projects are scarcely mentioned, these tend to dominate actual practice and are important as part of the whole picture of community action and needs in a neighbourhood. It is clear from the review that communities' engagement with concepts of social justice are somewhat understandably expressed through these substantive topics but are piecemeal when compared to known challenges and underlying problems, for example shown via IMD domain scores (and see [Annex III](#)).

The content review findings underscore the importance of understanding community perspectives on justice to inform policy and action. To provide a clearer indication of where the section findings derive from, [Annex III](#) sets out some of the English Plans that cited JEDI issues explicitly – noting that less than a quarter of the 45 neighbourhood plans in the English sample did so in any meaningful or discernible way. That figure is a tiny proportion of the NDPs which had been completed at the time the research commenced in late 2023. We now provide a summary of the review set across four main themes of justice equity, deprivation and inclusion.

### ***i. Justice in neighbourhood scale plans***

Few plans explicitly used the label justice, but many did raise matters that can be considered related to social, spatial and/or environmental justice. The Crail CLP (Scotland) was notable as one of the few to explicitly mention the word, explaining in its introduction that the plan was “*designed to improve local capacity to tackle poverty, reduce inequality and promote social justice*” (p. 3). The concern with issues related to social justice was a common one, however, and particularly in plans covering the most deprived places in the study. It is clear that communities' engagement with different dimensions of justice are often expressed through substantive topics such as housing or access to greenspace.

Linking material conditions with social challenges was a common approach, for example in England “*The housing conditions are associated with high levels of deprivation and anti-social behaviour which affects the quality of life of the community's residents*” (Spring Boroughs

Neighbourhood Plan, p. 25). In a similar fashion, spatial issues were often linked with social concerns, as in Towyn and Kinmel Bay, in Wales: *“The need for the project was in response to the place being fragmented and lacking cohesion both physically and by its community on this eastern edge of Conwy”* (p.9). Particularly in plans covering rural areas, the most common social justice concern was the loss of social infrastructure in the form of community facilities such as village halls, pubs, youth centres and doctors’ surgeries.

Most plans considered spatial aspects of justice in some form; a common issue, for example, was unequal access to services or amenities due to locational factors, or because of access to transport. In Colne (England), some 30% of the population do not have access to a car and this was used as justification for policies to protect local shops and public houses *“because they are often vulnerable to closure”* (p. 57) and to reduce inequality by ensuring facilities are fully accessible. Some acknowledged spatial justice need via regeneration of the area. The motivation to create a plan for several community groups was to expand upon already existing community-led regeneration efforts and access available funding (e.g. from the Towns Fund in the case of Boscombe and Pokesdown, and Stainforth, both England).

Access to public and private green spaces was also a consideration for many. In one area the plan noted that 96% of the population were in homes that did not have a garden, and the community was keen to address this by including gardens in the housing policy, thereby subsuming environmental goods and health and well-being outcomes in one policy. In Great Aycliffe, the key motivation was a large development that was expected by the Town Council, and they wished to maintain the importance of green open space locally.

Indeed, issues of environmental justice figured prominently in the reviewed plans. There were a variety of different ways that plans sought to address environmental challenges, including protecting, enhancing or introducing environmental assets, reducing environmental threats and other development-related mitigation policies, through travel and transport related policies and policy to encourage renewable energy. The reduction of environmental threats was a feature in some plans, both immediate, such as flooding, and longer term in terms of climate change. In the *Growing Together* plan (England, see [Annex III](#)), policies that would ensure high levels of energy efficiency are included alongside an attempt to influence local energy generation through renewable technologies. In Bridport for example, there was a focus on carbon with separate policies on ‘Publicising Carbon Footprint’, ‘Energy and Carbon Emissions’, and ‘Energy Generation to Offset Predicted Carbon Emissions’.

Issues of spatial, social and environmental justice were therefore addressed via a multitude of concrete policy solutions, often bridging different dimensions of justice. Due to the localised nature of community-led planning, it is unsurprising that most if not all policies had an inherently spatial dimension (e.g. promoting certain goods within a specific territory), but perhaps more interesting is how many social issues – such as anti-social behaviour or lack of social cohesion – were tied to the built environment. This was related either to physical distance between places, or a lack of social infrastructure, such as community centres. This could be attributed to the (land use) planning’s inherent concern with the built environment, yet this was a consistent theme across community plans regardless of the institutional context.

## ***ii. Equity considerations in plans***

Most, if not all, plans addressed the challenge of equity indirectly or by noting a need for equity rather than proposing specific action. For example, the Ruchill and Possilpark Community Plan (Scotland) explicitly committed themselves to “*tackling inequality*” (p.1), while the Newry, Mourne and Down Community Plan (Northern Ireland) mentions equity as a principle and aspiration for the area and another NI plan has it that ‘*The Big Plan is not about ensuring that everyone has equal access to services and facilities whether they need them or not. Equality, or equity, is about making sure that people have the support that they need to maintain their own wellbeing*’ (Ards and North Down Community Plan). Most often, equity was linked to the differential impacts of issues noted in relation to other challenges, for example, that older or disabled people might find the poor provision of footpaths a particular issue, or that younger people were particularly disadvantaged by a lack of employment opportunities or affordable housing. As an example, the Cupar and Country Community Action Plan (Scotland) contains a sophisticated analysis of the impacts of poor public transport provision on three specific groups “*people on benefits . . . young people . . . older people*” (p. 13).

Similarly, in the Welsh plans equity was most often discussed in terms of unequal access, for example, to housing, transport or employment, and differential effects of the lack of provision, for example, on young people lacking community facilities, or the elderly lacking efficient transport. Expanding upon the consideration on social justice above, there was some specific mention of “*social inequality*” (Colne CLP, England) and in Cramlington there was a policy on healthy communities – in the latter case the plan used the wording “*requiring development to contribute to creating an age friendly, healthy and equitable environment*” (p.52) and the terms

'inclusive' and 'access' form part of the supporting text. Some included phrasing that links equity with inclusivity, aiming to be '*accessible for all*' for example, in Colne, and Stainforth and in March neighbourhood plan "*sustainable [sic] will only be achieved if all sectors of the community are catered for*" (p.21). This highlights the overlap between key dimensions of justice as they are deployed by communities but also how the framing of such objectives is sometimes left as aspiration and without clear lines to action.

### **iii. Deprivation recognition in plans**

In the English plans, deprivation was rarely mentioned explicitly, and where it was it tended to be within the introduction of the plans or part of the context setting, rather than being a significant feature in substantive policy. One exception was the Braybrook plan (England), which contains an explicit recognition of its IMD status "*the area ranks relatively high (1st decile) on the Barriers to Housing and Services Index which means some residents may be disadvantaged due to financial accessibility to housing and physical access to local services*" (p. 6). In the Welsh plans, reference to the Welsh IMD to identify deprivation was also rare – an exception being the Towyn and Kinmel Bay Plan, Wales (p. 9), which observed that the community is "*low in the areas of health, wealth, education and environment*". This sparsity of recognition in Wales may reflect the fact that little evidence is required in a Place Plan, since they are not statutory documents. Those plans created with significant external expertise (such as Towyn and Kinmel Bay and Colwyn Bay) were notable for their use of evidence, however.

This was different in Scotland, where it was unusual for a plan not to discuss disadvantages or deprivation in some way. Sometimes this related to nuances in the Scottish IMD, for example, the Sandford and Upper Avondale plan observed that, whilst the area did not score particularly highly on the Scottish IMD overall, it was in the "*lowest 10–15% in Scotland for access to services*" (p.4). Variations within areas, and the identification of pockets of deprivation, was a recurring theme. Deprivation was recognised in most of the plans in the NI sample too. Sometimes the proxy of disadvantage is also used and, in several instances, poverty is mentioned. Typically, this word is deployed to highlight an economic and social gap in some areas for some groups. Other ways that deprivation was explicitly recognised was, for instance found in the Omagh and Fermanagh community plan: "*We will prioritise resources and activities towards targeting areas where deprivation and poverty are evident so as to narrow the gap between our most and least deprived communities*" (p.12) and this sentiment was similarly cited across six NI plans in total. There were no apparent differences in relative or absolute deprivation in the communities

sampled across the nations, suggesting other reasons for this differential approach, for example, it may be that the emphasis placed on deprivation in the guidance provided to communities by other support actors is a key variable.

#### ***iv. Inclusion and community engagement***

Inclusivity or inclusion was interpreted in different ways across the reviewed plans, with variations across the nations. Inclusion featured explicitly in most of the Northern Irish plans or documents, and considered to a lesser or greater degree of specificity (only two plans did not use the term explicitly; Ards, and North Down and Newry). However, where mentioned, it was generally either as broad aspiration for a “*happy and inclusive borough*” (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon plan, p.16) or more in terms of acknowledging a need for this to be accounted for in policy or pointing to rather vague aspirations to “*pilot local initiatives to support social inclusion*” (ibid., p.17).

Elsewhere, some plans addressed inclusion explicitly, such as in Cramlington (England), where the aim was to “*promote social and economic inclusion*”. Others addressed it through substantive issues such as the need for social activities for younger people, and older people, which occurred frequently, as did the need to build community spirit and ensure people feel more involved. In Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn (Wales), inclusive well-being was a key theme. For example, the plan adopted a definition from Disability Wales’ ‘Way to Go’ project and sought to go beyond issues of disabled access to think about a definition for everyone: “*parents with buggies, older people, people with less than perfect sight, less than perfect hearing, less than perfect mobility or less than perfect understanding of the world around them*” (p.31). The Kirkfieldbank Community Action Plan (Scotland) addressed both outcomes, noting the reduction in active community groups, and process, in stating that “*there is a desire for more communication about what’s going on in the village, particularly on how local plans are being implemented*” (p.17).

An emphasis on process (and inclusive process) was a common theme in Scottish plans, with many plans featuring quotations from community members on things they valued about their community, and things they would like to see improved (also a feature of Welsh plans) – the latter, in Scotland, often reflected a feeling of disconnection from decision-making. Some groups were clearly motivated to create a plan in England because of a general feeling of not being included, or having influence over planning matters in their local area: In Gainsborough, the Neighbourhood Development Plan used the acronym “RAGE”, indicating the mood felt by many

residents toward planning decisions made in the recent past. while also standing for *“Rediscovering A Gainsborough for Everyone”* (p.5). In contrast, in the Welsh plans, there was a notable lack of complaints regarding being disconnected from decision-making or being forgotten or bypassed by higher tiers of government.

A common motivation, however, was the withdrawal of state funding and services at the unitary authority level in Wales and the need for the relevant town or community council to ‘take over’ public services and community facilities, for example Welshpool: *“The budget cuts by the principal authorities affecting service delivery, some of which affect the structure of the town”* (p.3). The promotion of Welsh language, culture, and identity features prominently in most Welsh plans. Mold’s plan, for example, states: *“Mold’s identity as a Welsh town”* is steeped in the ‘rich cultural heritage of the Welsh language’<sup>2</sup> and this is directly linked to attempts to encourage community development activity.

In the Cumnock Community Action Plan (Scotland), the numerous actions include *“Improve rail links for Cumnock and explore re-opening of town station”* (p.25), whilst the Elie and Earlsferry Community Place Plan (Scotland) has an action to *“Provide more housing options . . . to enhance the health and wellbeing of the area; address fuel poverty through more sustainable construction”* (p.49). Other plans highlighted what had been achieved in recent years, whether by the community themselves or because of investment or policy change elsewhere. The Ruchill and Possilpark Community Plan (Scotland) identified that in addition to a new school provided by the local authority *“the local community has provided solutions for themselves”* (p.14) through voluntary activity. Community-focused actions were a common theme, often in response to a perceived failure or lack of action by the public or private sectors. These ranged in ambition, for example, the Woolfords, Auchengray and Tarbrax Community Action Plan (Scotland) included *“Explore the feasibility of community-run gritting and snow clearance . . . [and] Explore the feasibility of community-owned transport for local groups”* (p.13). Exploring community ownership of assets, whether minibuses, shops or houses, was an aspiration expressed in several plans.

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<sup>2</sup> The cases of Colwyn (Conwy) and Rhyl (Denbighshire) both have less than 25% Welsh speakers, while Welsh speaking has not been rising overall but is more prevalent in other parts of North Wales (2011 census data).

It is fair to say that some of the plans reviewed were stronger on identifying the problems, issues and challenges faced by the place than they were on specifying deliverable actions in relation to our framework. This reflects the scope of the plans and the ability of communities to achieve meaningful change to the places they live in, as we return below, rather than a lack of ambition on the part of those neighbourhoods.

#### **v. Content review synthesis**

Community-led plans reveal complex interpretations of justice and highlight local aspirations, or ‘everyday’ concerns (Lynn *et al.*, 2025; Uitermark and Nicholls, 2017). Key themes identified include access to public services, environmental risks, and social infrastructure. The plans frequently address issues related to deprivation, such as lack of affordable housing and health services, though they tend not to explicitly refer to these as being tied to deprivation *per se*. The analysis thus reveals that discussions of justice often centre on local issues rather than abstract concepts and that communities prioritise practical solutions to local injustices over theoretical discussions of justice or wider integrated solutions. This prompts us to argue for a review of planning practices to ensure that they do address the needs and priorities of deprived communities and that planning context and evidence is available, accessible, applied and reflected in plans.

Actions or policies related to seeking social justice, such as providing local access to affordable or social housing are often framed as solutions. However, few plans explicitly reference the four key ‘JEDI’ concepts. This is important for researchers and policymakers seeking to work with communities, as these terms are not how communities seek to express themselves, yet virtually all the plans reviewed do recognise challenges associated with justice, equity, disadvantage, and inclusion, albeit to varying extents or with a lack of systemisation. For policymakers and others, adopting language that is closer to and better understood by communities and minimising technocratic, academic or otherwise jargon-laden terminology is likely to be beneficial in facilitating partnership work.

A striking aspect of the plans considered in this review was the variation in approach, from short, informal reports of a single consultation event to comprehensive, professionally guided plans. This may be explained in part due to the bricolage of CLPs that apply to the very local level outside England – the most ‘formal’ status a CLP in Wales and Scotland can achieve is Supplementary Planning Guidance (i.e. relevant for LPA decision-making but not statutory), but many plans did not carry, or seek to carry, this status. This affords communities more scope in

approach and content, but places less importance on producing evidenced, actionable policies, or linking to existing policy. Moreover, there appears to be a general unwillingness to acknowledge the overall deprivation of the communities at the centre of the plans reviewed. Whilst at first this may seem surprising, careful consideration might suggest that in forward-looking documents such as plans the tendency might be to seek the positive in framing how the future might look.

What is much less clear is how justice related recognition and aspirations are taken forward or indeed, whether the extent of ambition may be tempered by bounding or rescripting (see Parker *et al.*, 2015; Sturzaker *et al.*, 2022). Although there were exceptions, plans lacked specificity in identifying who was responsible for desired actions, and many actions and policies within plans were frequently outside of land-use/planning issues. Taken collectively, the proposals, suggestions and aspirations expressed in the plans are a clear demonstration of the importance of social and spatial justice to individuals and at neighbourhood scale, although rarely if ever expressed in a systematic way or corresponding to known IMD domain weaknesses. It is instead the sporadic nature of such explicit or related issue identification that demonstrates a need for greater support and emphasis to inscribe justice at this scale, and this be used to access resource and further necessary action.

If Justice related issues are known, but not inscribed, there remains an unresolved question about how linked issues, policies and actions are seen as important (and directed to tackling deprivation imperatives) and that whether 'JEDI' questions should be kept visible as the plan is applied, or can effectively influence decisions and policy 'above' in ways that will address social justice. In short, we consider that policymakers need to think much more about how justice is firstly; understood and deconstructed into 'everyday' policy, then; how is it both inscribed and then lastly acted upon. Those stages, plus an earlier step which frames or bounds the planning activity are clearly important; that is how initial scope and terms of engagement are determined, which is then likely to shape all subsequent steps or stages.

## 4. Key findings II – case studies

Below, we provide an overall nation by nation summary derived from the work across the UK. This is followed by a synthesis and key points. An overview of cases and context appears in [Annexes IV–VII](#) and these provide more detail on the cases and community-led planning in the nations generally.

At various points in this report, we have noted the need to reflect upon how well neighbourhood scale ‘community-led’ planning can be said to reflect community preferences. A key part of this reflection involves asking how representative of the full breadth of community perspectives such activity is – an issue raised across the relevant literature (cf. Bradley and Brownill, 2017; Brookfield, 2017). Likewise, there was a need for us to consider this when undertaking the research. As noted above, we have undertaken more than 160 interviews with various individuals. It is important to remember, however, that whilst these individuals may (claim to) act as representatives of their communities, their views cannot be equated with “the community” as a whole. In the discussion and analysis which follows we have sought to differentiate between opinions expressed on a personal basis and those which might, with varying degrees of legitimacy, be said to reflect wider perspectives of others in the community. This is also in line with our aim to understand how plans have been formed (or not), rather than attempt ourselves to achieve a comprehensive understanding of all residents in our case study areas.

### 4.1 English case studies – summary

The English cases were taken from Middlesbrough and Doncaster and some context, and factual materials are found in [Annexes III and IV](#). In Middlesbrough we focussed on the Newport/Gresham area and the North Ormesby neighbourhood. In Doncaster Stainforth and Conisbrough and Denaby Main were the selected case areas.

#### ***Middlesbrough***

The case studies in Middlesbrough reflect experiences of planning and neighbourhood policy across two inner-city wards facing the long-term consequences of industrial decline and top-down regeneration. Newport has a Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS) in place, and a large-scale regeneration project is currently being implemented. North Ormesby has received

investment through Big Local<sup>3</sup>, and both wards have community hubs funded by Middlesbrough Council and have active Selective Landlord Licensing (SLL) schemes in place.

Taken together, the Middlesbrough cases show the neighbourhoods are marked by long-standing deprivation, repeated waves of regeneration and intense local effort to sustain everyday life. Newport/Gresham and North Ormesby illustrate communities living with poor housing, degraded environments, high crime and health inequalities; alongside vibrant voluntary and informal activity aimed at improving day to day lives, streets, green spaces and support networks. Participation in planning activity appears shaped less by apathy than by survival pressures. A transient population, racial tensions and a deep-rooted scepticism about whether engagement actually produces change affects engagement. Respondents described persistent barriers to community-led planning being both a focus on immediate needs and a history of past programmes and unmet promises, which continue to influence action and expectation.

Despite these constraints, community priorities were clearly articulated across the cases, even where they were not formalised through plans, or other formal instruments. Residents emphasised to us safety, decent housing, cleaner streets, youth provision, accessible green space and culturally inclusive meeting spaces. Micro-scale projects, including alleyway transformations, murals, pocket parks, gardens and local history initiatives demonstrated how everyday acts of place-making can foster pride, connection and ownership, often producing more immediate improvements in quality of life than large-scale regeneration. Yet such initiatives were widely described as fragile where statutory partners could not safeguard sites, respond to vandalism, or provide long-term maintenance. Individuals with planning literacy existed in both neighbourhoods, but their influence was frequently constrained outside time-limited programmes and several respondents noted that little systematic attention had been paid to sustaining what works once funding ends.

Intermediaries emerged as central to navigating these conditions, with organisations such as Planning Aid England and Local Trust actively involved. Community organisations, hubs, faith groups, development trusts and residents acted as translators between systems and lived experience, building confidence, brokering access to services and convening dialogue across differences. Participants stressed the importance of relational and social infrastructure, as

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<sup>3</sup> see: <https://localtrust.org.uk/big-local/about-big-local/>

distinct from physical infrastructure, arguing that engagement and planning often arose as a by-product of sustained trust-building rather than formal consultation. At the same time, respondents highlighted a persistent disconnect between neighbourhood-level practice and statutory planning, which was often perceived as focused on regulation rather than community life. Suggestions from residents included developing clearer social contracts around new development in the area, strengthening feedback loops between neighbourhood teams and planners, and embedding local priorities more firmly in decision-making, particularly where residents were grappling with issues, such as neglected properties or environmental repairs, that lay beyond community capacity to address directly.

High levels of population transience further complicate engagement, reinforcing the need for external trusted intermediaries to understand mobility, attachment and stability within neighbourhoods. The cases also underscored the emotional and political labour of community leadership, with respondents emphasising conflict-resolution skills, long-term presence and need for institutional humility, including local institutions / local authorities to shift to a culture of working with neighbourhoods as ‘guests’ rather than distant regulators.

The Middlesbrough cases indicate:

- The extent to which neighbourhood-level planning tools struggle to gain traction where decision makers do not **use them to inform decision making** or are unaware of them
- **Neighbourhood planning risks reinforcing perceptions of exclusion** rather than functioning as a mechanism through which residents can meaningfully influence regeneration – unless there is **clarity about how community priorities will be used** in decision-making and sustained institutional commitment to co-production
- Wider **distrust**, limited feedback loops, contested narratives, and **uneven institutional support** continue to shape whether community voice translates into greater or sustained improvements
- Challenges of navigating social division and political mistrust dominate everyday experience, which present **significant barriers for** community leaders attempting to motivate others
- There is a need for CLP processes in such contexts to prioritise **long-term relationship-building** within and across communities
- Contexts where meaningful change is usually experienced most strongly through trusted **intermediaries**, often from within the community; and micro-scale, resident-owned action

is regarded as the more impactful on improving quality of life than large scale regeneration schemes

Taken together, the Middlesbrough studies suggest that future community-led planning will depend less on producing formal plans alone (although they are needed to orchestrate action) and more on sustained investment in relational infrastructure, accessible language, micro-scale initiatives and visible follow-through as part of the development of a co-production culture. In contexts shaped by historic marginalisation and institutional mistrust, community-led planning appears most viable where local authorities act as long-term partners, protecting local initiative, sharing power and remaining engaged beyond the life cycle of individual funding programmes. By the time the research team were finishing Middlesbrough Council had itself concluded that: *“the key approach to “shifting the dial” is to produce neighbourhood plans that will produce focused action plans that draw in all partners to address the priorities that are outlined in those plans”* (Middlesbrough Council, 2025, p.8).

### **Doncaster**

Taken together, the Doncaster case studies reveal communities shaped by pit closures and the subsequent reduction in sense of community, yet showing strong local attachment to place. There are long histories of regeneration intervention across the district, alongside persistent mistrust in decision-making systems. Across Stainforth and Conisbrough and Denaby Main, residents articulated deep pride in their histories and landscapes, particularly their mining heritage and valued green spaces, while also expressing frustration at being marginalised from major development decisions affecting their everyday lives.

In both case study locations, community-led planning and regeneration efforts were motivated by concerns over health, safety, environmental quality, youth provision, housing choice, and the erosion of local identity. Stainforth’s Neighbourhood Development Plan represented one of the most ambitious community-led planning exercises across our study, seeking to embed justice concerns around heritage, accessibility and wellbeing into statutory policy. In Conisbrough and Denaby Main, meanwhile, residents pursued informal and place-based strategies, including a community-led plan, environmental projects and campaigns against nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) proposals perceived to threaten valued local landscape.

Residents questioned whether formal engagement translated into meaningful influence, particularly once political priorities, regeneration funding programmes or land interests entered

the process. In Stainforth, tensions emerged around the collapse of a proposed Neighbourhood Development Order stemming from disagreements within the Town Council about economic development, job creation priorities and pressures from the local developer which were perceived to run counter to community aspirations being expressed in community-led planning activity. Furthermore, community leaders felt excluded from decisions made about the £21m Towns Fund grant (awarded in 2021), achieved largely due to their persistence in the neighbourhood planning process. In Conisbrough and Denaby Main, fatigue with consultation, digital exclusion and frustration with council-led processes shaped scepticism toward neighbourhood planning, with some community leaders expressing little appetite to pursue statutory plans where trust in outcomes was low.

Across Doncaster, justice was frequently enacted not through production of plans alone, but through everyday acts of place-making: protecting libraries, reclaiming green spaces, creating youth projects and campaigning for heritage and landscape preservation. These human-scale interventions were described as central to local dignity, belonging and quality of life; even where they struggled to secure recognition within formal regeneration frameworks.

The Doncaster cases illustrated:

- How **neighbourhood plans can function as vehicles for a range of local concerns** (e.g. heritage protection, health-focused place-making and collective aspiration) and be responsive to local injustice
- How **fragile** neighbourhood plans can be where political contestation, development pressures and uneven understanding of neighbourhood planning dilute their potential. This is often where injustice is felt keenly
- **Sustained institutional commitment** to apply locally articulated priorities, beyond the production of the plan itself, is needed
- Planning processes run the **risk of deepening scepticism** rather than rebuilding trust in planning as a tool for justice-led regeneration. There are also fears that planning processes can be **co-opted by statutory bodies and scepticism about the weight community views will have on decision making**
- **Rebuilding trust between communities and the council, strengthening two-way communication, and resourcing long-term intermediaries** is important and without these conditions, CLP risks reinforcing disengagement rather than enabling communities to shape regeneration on their own terms

- **Intermediaries**, locally embedded residents, social enterprises and community organisers played a critical role in sustaining activity across both case studies, from shaping neighbourhood plans to maintaining green spaces and convening residents. Yet their work was often precarious, dependent on short-term funding or voluntary labour, and vulnerable to exhaustion, political disillusionment or needing to pursue a paid job

## 4.2 English case studies – themes and reflection

In combination the English case studies reveal persistent tensions between community aspiration and institutional power. Across Stainforth, Newport/Gresham, North Ormesby and Conisbrough and Denaby Main, residents mobilised around planning and regeneration activity because of perceived injustice in housing, health, environmental quality, safety and exclusion from decision-making. Interviews with local authority officers highlighted the importance of relational capacity in community planning and responding to local injustice, particularly relating to the ability of communities, practitioners and institutions to build shared understanding, manage difference and work through complex decisions together. Strengthening this relational capacity requires trust-building. Communities need to see clear evidence that their voices influence decisions, while institutions must recognise and support the leadership, knowledge and commitment already present within neighbourhoods. Without this, even well-intentioned engagement processes risk reinforcing perceptions that decisions are ultimately shaped elsewhere.

What was striking from the case studies, however, was not only the evident deprivation, but the depth of local attachment: residents who spoke with love about their streets, histories and neighbours, and who were already organising, caring, researching and imagining new futures for their places. Alongside this commitment ran a sense of exhaustion and frustration, shaped by systems that many felt did not fully see or value what they were doing, often hindering their progress and lacking effective support.

Whether neighbourhood plans, priority statements or informal community strategies were pursued, community members frequently questioned whether those tools translated into meaningful influence when major funding streams, land interests or political considerations entered the process. While policy discourse often frames trust as something that must be shared, what emerged was a strong desire from communities themselves to (co)lead, and ultimately to be trusted as decision makers themselves.

Justice, equity and inclusion motivated participation, yet procedural involvement did not consistently translate into substantive influence. Residents distinguished between planners, often viewed as supportive, and political or development actors, who were perceived as holding decisive authority and who did not consider the community's priorities important. This gap between participation and power fuelled mistrust and, in some cases, reduced appetite for further planning activity.

Across all cases, low relational capacity, shaped by industrial decline, migration, stigma and transience constrained collective action. However, the central role of intermediaries is important, largely locally embedded residents who mobilised neighbours, brokered relationships, identified everyday needs and sustained participation over long periods (as well as formal intermediaries in the form of consultants and development workers). Yet such contributions remained fragile, frequently voluntary, and vulnerable to burnout or disillusionment.

The cases also highlighted tension within statutory planning frameworks between protecting future assets and safeguarding the everyday infrastructures on which current residents rely. In two of the case studies, the neighbourhood plan set out to carefully preserve sightlines from heritage assets as well as libraries, paths, meeting places and green spaces seen as important in daily life but which were not upheld in later decisions. For residents, the imbalance raised questions about whose quality of life was being prioritised and whether planning is actually improving quality of life of the people who already live in these places.

Stigma emerged as a further cross-cutting injustice. Being labelled “deprived” was experienced by some as disempowering, obscuring local strengths and reinforcing a sense of being judged (rather than being trusted). Respondents called for broader measures of success to be asserted, including pride, belonging, heritage, safety and wellbeing, to sit alongside conventional indicators.

### **4.3 Scotland case studies - summary**

The cases selected in Scotland were Benarty in Fife, a former mining area; and Barmulloch, Balornock & Robroyston (BBR) in Glasgow (see [Annex V](#)). In Benarty, the Local Place Plan (LPP) is seen as being an essential step in addressing local issues, but, importantly, only a step – the key actors involved in its production recognise that in many ways ‘the hard work starts now’. The LPP is being used in discussions with Fife Council to give the community a stronger voice in

decision making around planning and development; and is likely to be an important tool in bidding for funding.

In BBR, the Local Place Plan (the ‘BBRLPP’) is also seen as being only a step on the journey towards addressing the issues faced by these communities in eastern Glasgow. The BBRLPP was one of ten LPPs in Glasgow, which were provided with funding to produce their plan, most of which, as is the case with BBRLPP, featured a community development company or similar organisation. The Barmulloch Community Development Company (BCDC) applied for the funding and commissioned the consultant who supported the community in preparing the plan, and the plan has now been taken up by the two relevant Community Councils in the area.

A factor which unites the Scotland case study plans is that neither of them place justice, equity, deprivation and inclusivity issues front and centre. A close reading of both plans does reveal the importance of related concerns and these issues recurred in our interviews and discussions with members of the communities. In the collaborative workshop which took place towards the end of the research process, we explicitly asked community representatives why they had chosen, given the evident (based on Scottish IMD data) deprivation in their communities, not to focus upon this. In both communities it seems that “quality of life” as opposed to JEDI is the key motivating factor – and whilst in many cases this does relate to JEDI aspects, a community member told us that moving up the ‘league table’ of deprivation is not a direct measurement of success – and perhaps this is unsurprising. There was also a recognition that the aspirations of the plan will take time to come into effect, and that any impact upon deprivation statistics will take longer to transpire.

#### **4.4 Scottish case studies – themes and reflection**

The evidence from the case studies in Scotland are that the Scottish instantiation of Community Led Planning, Local Place Plans, *are* community led. There are several caveats to this, as noted below, but these early examples of LPPs do not provide substantive evidence of the “framing” of English Neighbourhood Plans by central or local government.

That said, whilst the LPP process is being led by communities, the lack of financial support for LPP production is a major barrier to their uptake, particularly in more deprived places. Our two case studies of Benarty in Fife and BBR in Glasgow, *do* exhibit deprivation in both relative and absolute measures, but are rare amongst the pioneers of LPP production in Scotland. Hence, the role of other actors in galvanising and supporting communities to produce LPPs has been

essential. In Benarty, this has taken the form of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, who have been instrumental in the plan being successful. In Barmulloch, Balornock & Robroyston, the Barmulloch Community Development Company (BCDC) had the resources and understanding to apply for the grant provided by Glasgow City Council, which in turn was essential in paying for the consultant who has produced the plan – at a cost significantly below the market rate. There is therefore a major question about the long term take up of LPPs in communities without support, and a risk if such supporting organisations are seen as dominating – in BBR community members *“needed to be persuaded that this [the LPP] is not a BCDC initiative”* (Interview G4).

The audiences for the LPPs are similar in both Benarty and Barmulloch, Balornock & Robroyston – stakeholders told us that they wanted to engage both the wider community itself and national/local government, with prevailing views that the latter was essential because community members were otherwise too rarely heard in formal planning decision-making. They told us that a key challenge with LPPs is walking the line between having a too community-friendly document which does not contain enough policy-relevant language; and the converse, which would be very aligned with policy priorities but less what the community wants to see, and hence they may become disengaged from it. This issue is recognisable in CLP activity across and beyond the UK. Overall, the lessons from the Scotland work are that:

- Given a framework and support, communities are **keen to take action to address their own needs – but that this will be on their terms**, addressing concerns that they identify, which **may not necessarily align with what external assessment may consider to be most significant**
- In terms of social justice there is little engagement in direct terms – instead the related objective of **improving quality of life was a driver**
- The local place plans that are being produced can be viewed as broadly community-led (or co-produced), yet **take-up is limited and resources are limiting necessary support**

#### 4.5 Welsh case studies – summary

The Welsh experience shows the impact of strong external support for community-level planning in the form of county-level government and external partners. The case studies focused on two plans – Bay of Colwyn Place Plan 2024 and Rhyl Placemaking Plan 2025 – both delivered via significant, although slightly different forms of, community engagement, and influence from the

relevant County Council. The result is two professional and polished strategies that are well-aligned with national frameworks.

In Colwyn, the Place Plan received strong support from the Town Council, with assistance from Planning Aid Wales who ostensibly conducted the community engagement using several innovative methodologies. The plan demonstrates significant community ‘buy-in’. Here, plan-making activity was closer to the community and a practical understanding of justice rooted in fairness, inclusion, and the safeguarding of valued assets is demonstrated, with the plan already shaping development in the form of affordable housing provision. It would be hard to call the plan community-led (in the fashion of many Neighbourhood Plans in England), but the subsequent working groups established display more community ownership.

In Rhyl, the Placemaking Plan (and its 2025 update) tries to situate itself within regional and national policy frameworks and is clearly designed to send a message of confidence in Rhyl’s future to outside audiences. This reflects the heavy involvement of the County Council and (unlike other case studies) the presence of significant outside investment involved direct from the Welsh and UK Governments. This funding has incentivised, and often requires, institutionally led plans (i.e. by the County Council and now the Neighbourhood Board). This also likely explains the reticence to deal with deprivation in a more explicit manner. Akin to the Scottish case studies, JEDI issues emerge more strongly in discussions with community members and local councillors, as well as background materials on community engagement, than in finalised documents.

#### 4.6 Welsh case studies - themes and reflections

The cases indicate some common or significant issues or themes:

- There is a strong **influence of local government** in community-led planning in Wales, not least as conduit for significant national funding
- In both cases, the relevant County Council was active in its engagement, although activity in Colwyn appeared to be closer to the community rather than in Rhyl where there was more community ambivalence toward planning activities
- Professionalisation is seen as a double-edged sword: in both cases, especially Rhyl, substantial **external funding** (both contemporary and historic) alongside county-led plan-making have produced polished strategies that are well-aligned with national

frameworks, but that have tended to privilege physical regeneration and external confidence-building over every day social needs articulated by residents

Substantively, the cases also indicate how the weighting of different approaches to the future can be problematic, both in terms of actual impacts but also in terms of how matters are deliberated, understood and agreed. This issue is apparent where tensions between tourism-led visions and post-tourism realities are alive in both towns; this manifests in dilemmas over whether to pursue aspirational, ‘destination’ narratives, or reorient towards resilience or even diversified economies that balance tourism with local wellbeing. This issue appears particularly salient in ‘left behind’ coastal communities.

Connected to this issue is coastal regeneration, which is variously framed in both cases as a form of climate adaptation and being crucial to tourism. The recent history of creating sea defences and pursuing beach rejuvenation reveals how environmental decisions can reproduce inequality when investment in waterfronts can deliver visible benefits and protection, but also produce uneven gains for local populations (for example, bypassing physically or socially disconnected neighbourhoods further inland). Finally, it is not always clear, in either case, how priorities in ‘community-led’ plans are joined-up with policy making in wider economic development and environmental action work across the region.

#### **4.7 Northern Irish case studies - summary**

The way in which place planning and similar formats is being approached in NI cannot be deemed community-led and the credentials of any claims to co-production must also be queried based on our study (see also Rafferty, 2020). There have been reasons for past reticence to approach planning in a community-led form with political difficulties shaping that view in the past. Critical to this work is how questions of deprivation as issues and then action / solutions are kept in view, given the underlying challenges in deprived areas. Northern Ireland differs from the rest of the UK in that neighbourhood renewal areas (NRAs) still exist and are funded by national government with embedded cultures that tend not to rely on community planning efforts.

Both NI cases in West Armagh (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon district) and in Colin, West Belfast (and see [Annex VII](#)), centre on largely public sector, or housing association, dominated residential areas and both are designated as NRAs. Colin has lacked careful urban design consideration until recently and even then, this directed attention to one aspect of the needs of the area (i.e. physical services in a new ‘town centre’). In the West Armagh situation, the residential area is similar in some ways to Colin but it is close to the centre of the City and does not lack for access to services *per se*. There have however been planning efforts that appear to have elided the issues faced in the Western part of Armagh, which implies a lack of concerted effort to work with the community in a more strategic or deliberative way on issues that drive their high IMD rankings.

Planning efforts are patchy or have not genuinely involved the neighbourhoods under study. This may be partly to with scale, or to do with the culture underpinning NRA activity which is not holistic in its intent. The terms and scope of planning processes and the agencies involved are typically invited to enable planning which is rarely if ever performed on a whole place basis; or appear to shy away from overtly assessing how action / policy will address IMD domain standings.

In order to develop trust and a sense of ownership the past approaches will need to be modified. Certainly, there are lessons to be drawn from co-production via Neighbourhood Planning in England (Parker *et al.*, 2023) and the role of sectoral actors jointly shaping and integrating policy priorities. Findings from NI show that agencies are moving in that direction but plans to work intently on identified scales of deprivation does not appear to be emerging.

Secondly, in a more substantive sense, tackling issues of injustice and linked deprivation need to be faced. Policy and action explicitly linked to the big issues facing particular neighbourhoods should be clear, and in this way, plans will need to be more outcomes focussed but not shy away from recognising and keeping in sight more difficult issues that may only be addressed via multiple or major intervention (such as estate regeneration), or be long term. A culture has emerged, not only in NI, where planning documents dial down on ambition for fear of non-delivery or raising expectations.

A national review of the approach to community planning and regeneration was emerging just as the data collection phase of the research was ending, prompted partly in response to the reformulated UK government neighbourhood policy launched in 2025. What we can distil from the Northern Ireland work are issues still of a lack of integrated thinking in spatial and issue /

land-use terms, and a lack of genuine co-production at critical times and in important policy shaping. Also, that the scale or focus of activity is too large – self-identified or logical boundaries for action are needed following the well-worn maxim of form following function. Moreover, there is recognition of questions of deprivation, poverty and relative lack of services or economic opportunity; but such matters tend to be diluted or marginalised.

#### 4.8 Northern Irish case studies - themes and reflections

By way of summary, what we can see are a set of themes that the work revealed. These are largely system and policy issues:

- Lack of direct **relationship between issues of injustice / deprivation and policy and actions** in local policy and related strategy – despite there being both long established NRAs and the availability of the tools of Community Plans and Place Plans
- **Scale and focus** - community planning in NI operates at a high level – it carries a label that cannot really be considered appropriate to the focus of the research, or to the **scale** at which ‘community’ self-identifies, or other designations exist (e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal Areas), Place plans are patchy and where they exist do not embody co-production credentials as well as lacking statutory weight
- **Issue ‘concealment’** - that aspirational policy in Place Plans does not appear to land with community members and can act to conceal the issues faced in deprived areas
- **Disconnects across plans, strategies and issues** - NRAs cover a wide range of issues/activity – but lacking a clear Plan or linkage to other policy tools
- **Funding cycles** in NI do not appear to allow for longer term or joined up thinking about deeper issues faced by deprived areas
- *The work indicates an ongoing issue of **fragmented internal working** and multiple actors in the voluntary and community space*

A succinct distillation in this segment of the work resolves to questions of **focus, scale** and **integration**, as well as a **lack of credible co-production** in the way place planning has been carried out in the past decade.

By way of conclusion, it is notable that as the research progressed the UK government (elected May 2024) and NI government policy towards neighbourhoods and placemaking / and the

approach to deprived areas was in flux, with the UK government announcing its *Plan for Neighbourhoods* in March 2025 and then the *Pride in Place* programme in September 2025. This follows from reviews of community partnerships and neighbourhood renewal (carried out in 2014) and the *People and Place* review (initiated 2020) in NI and due to be approved at Ministerial level ‘by end of 2025’ (DfC, no date). That review “*publicly committed to a comprehensive and strategic review of the current People and Place Strategy to improve how the Department addresses the objective need of a place-based approach to tackling deprivation*” (DfC, no date).

#### **4.9 Overall themes and findings: UK-wide and across the research stages**

At the outset we wanted to explore three overarching questions related to what communities understand as (in)justice through efforts to plan for the future. Our theoretical frame and the associated literature show how complex the idea of social justice is and how planning has a mixed track record in addressing this as a goal. What some neighbourhood representatives told us is that ‘planning’ can also become a vehicle for imposing greater spatial, social, environmental *injustice* in present conditions. Both the progressive potential, and the seemingly regressive outcomes perceived to be products, of conventional planning act in support of efforts to do better.

We cast the work, and the challenge associated with the above, in both procedural and outcome terms, coalescing around three poles: firstly, an ***understanding axis***, which also relates to knowledge of issues and the available means to address them. Secondly, considering how priorities and actions are established by communities (and others), and moreover how these relate to questions of injustice or fairness - corresponding to a ***process axis***. Thirdly, we wanted to better understand how forms of community-led planning *actually* address issues of injustice and the neighbourhood scale - which relates to our ***outcome axis***. This tri-fold concern was carried through and across the stages of the research.

##### ***Reconciling the research aims: understanding, process and outcomes***

In synthesis, the findings and themes relate to our aims and research questions in terms of the three axes, firstly in terms of *understanding*:

- **Plans are not always seen as a reliable means to achieve goals** – past local experience, power and an urge for speed can partly account for this

- Better recognition is needed that poorly planned, coordinated or proofed projects or programmes can make a situation worse
- There is a need to '**resocialise**' **planning** and for intermediaries to facilitate 'good' hyper-local planning
- There is frustration over 'decisions from above' - which cut against community interest - even where hyper-local action or priorities are in place
- Acknowledging planning effort vs project action – recognise the importance of actually confronting problems and challenges via plans. This should involve action planning - identifying who and how to address these issues even if the 'plan' cannot deliver it. The plan should maintain visibility and indicate where, why and who can assist - even if the challenge is likely to be long-term and or incremental

In terms of *process*:

- **Co-ownership** of problems and solutions is needed and there should be care over deliberation of alternatives in order to develop a **shared vision**
- **Support and facilitation** are highly valued – but there remain questions over whether 'who pays' can influence the basis and scope of the activity, so the commissioning and basis or terms of reference need attention

In terms of *outcomes*:

- To press for greater 'inscriptive justice' by ensuring the challenges are written down and endorsed as valid, and acknowledged as priorities for future tangible action
- Follow-up and through to **action** - which implies degrees of 'co-implementation'
- **Vertical and lateral linkage and transparency of impact** - such that residents can see how change is unfolding and why

For deprived areas, waves of past intervention have had limited, if well meaning, impact on deprivation indicators in many deprived neighbourhoods. So, using whole place planning to help orchestrate long term action and resources appears logical. This raises a wider policy issue – should plans overtly and clearly address matters of social justice, particularly in areas of pronounced deprivation? If not, then where and how will such matters be sufficiently recognised as priorities across policy silos, and among actors, horizontally and vertically? Recent work by

the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON, 2026) clearly argues for better integration of policy action and oversight nationally, as well as locally.

The research shows the multiple factors that can confound progressive socially aware planning as well as how some neighbourhoods are actively using existing tools to inscribe local justice through plans and wider action. The case studies, review work and the literature have all showed some repeating issues. The literature review identified common themes, many of which chimed across the cases we explored in more depth spanning from questions of leadership (and co-production), processes, resources, relations, scope and power. The full span of themes and the sub-themes (see [Annex I](#)), also provide food for thought in programme and policy design terms, and when considered specifically in relation to areas faced with deprivation.

Our plan content review highlighted how few CLPs actually made issues of justice and deprivation explicit or prominent and instead, the relatively few that exist in deprived areas approach progressive policy and issues either indirectly, or in a fragmented way. In short, they are either not, or are only weakly, inscribing issues of social, spatial and environmental justice. However, many issues cited and the policies devised are, largely focussed on what we term ‘everyday’ questions but which can be traced to concerns over just outcomes (see Lynn *et al.*, 2025). Weak inscription and adoption vertically by institutional actors present a clear governance weakness.

What we also found in the content review was that motivators and issues that were recognised are often indirectly, or not explicitly, seen as related to social justice. Factors of past experience, and perceived or actual lack of influence, are germane here. Indeed, rather than engage enthusiastically with invited participation, some neighbourhoods (or some key actors *in* neighbourhoods) adopt different strategies; direct lobbying for resources, sometimes setting their sights on limited achievable goals.

The case studies provide an insight on the motives and experiences of local community representatives and their variable experience of the forms of plans that conform broadly to the CLP label (as discussed in the introduction). These learnings reinforced aspects surfaced in the reviews and helped explain why plans, such as those assessed in the content review, presented as they did. Our view is that reactions and attempts to achieve positive results in areas where deep-seated or stubborn deprivation persists, suggests that a need to approach matters in a more systemic and coordinated way – that is, a planned and sustained approach will be required.

Prior studies have also concluded that neighbourhood regeneration requires place to be a priority - as well as 'people'. It seems to us that a neglect, or poor purposing, of planning activity is unhelpful in addressing place improvement. In areas of deprivation, this becomes even more important and requires a repurposing on the one hand, and on the other a need to see actions, projects and other local activity as part of a whole system; and for 'total place' planning to be an integral part of efforts to regenerate such areas. The themes we have drawn from the cases and via our review work show how the work could easily be extended, particularly given that new approaches (e.g. the Pride in Place Programme (PPiP) and associated Neighbourhood or Town Boards) are being tested currently. We take the view that while imperfect, attention should be paid to the improvement and coordination of planning tools and initiatives and a realignment of their design and scope to contend with justice. We have derived seven themes or aspects, which are linked to some extent, and are also reflected in the recommendations that follow-on from here.

#### **i. Justice and plans**

What our work highlights is that explicit and direct engagement with social justice is rare but that there is greater indirect attention in areas of deprivation over matters of local injustice, even if centring on particular every day or low-key issues. This attention appears weak in terms of coordination of issues and objectively assessed problems overall. Instead, the related objective of improving quality of life was a driver shown via the content review and in the case studies. For example, individual issues, such as social/affordable housing are typically recognised.

#### **ii. Need to repurpose, rehabilitate (or abandon) existing tools**

There appears to be a worrying lack of understanding of past failure and limits of policy tools and initiatives in government nationally and locally. Existing planning tools may be repurposed however, and the type of themes and issues pointed towards in this research could usefully inform rehabilitation and reorientation. A proliferation of different named strategies and plans can easily alienate communities and so working with some areas to refashion the planning approach, scope and basis could prove a more durable and beneficial way forward. This may actually involve adopting special planning arrangements for such areas – to ensure that policy and priority are honed with sufficient specificity, power and co-production to sustain necessary change for deprived areas.

### **iii. Planning potential**

Preparation and deliberation before, and oversight of implementation after, are important parts of the management of change and if not considered properly then actions are far more likely to fail those they purport to serve. For planning to be progressive and effective at the neighbourhood scale, the role and potentials need to be understood. Typically, or ideally, and in the spirit of collaborative planning, this would first involve the development of collective awareness, problem ownership; and then of coordination, prioritisation and enabling appropriate action. A plan is not the endpoint but one stage of a process of effecting change in communities and we think it important to better conceive of a ‘theory of change’ for deprived neighbourhoods with the plan one consequence of that approach. Equally, neighbourhood scale plans will need to be respected or institutionally ‘embedded’ (cf. Bussu and Bua, 2022); and as we argue here - more clearly ‘inscribed’ and better understood by decision makers, partner organisations and other actors.

### **iv. Politics and neighbourhood scale policy**

Questions came through the work of frustration and disillusionment with institutional actors who either ignore community agendas, or with plans and strategy writing which does not lead to tangible improvements in lived experience. The ongoing influence of local government in ‘community-led’ planning, and not least as conduit for significant national funding, should not be ignored. Co-produced activity can still prompt competing visions and solutions, and weighting of different approaches to the future. This issue is apparent where tensions between communities and local institutions are not resolved collaboratively. This appeared to be a particular issue in the Welsh communities we looked at, or indeed where neighbourhood scale policy can be seemingly ignored - as was the case in Stainforth, or in Armagh. Those examples also highlight that funding does not necessarily resolve underlying issues; in fact, it can worsen relations, and necessary care to coordinate spend effectively is also required.

### **v. Scale and scope of neighbourhood activity**

Across the nations the geographical scale used for ‘place planning’ varies and in some instances, boundaries appear inappropriately drawn. The areas targeted do need to be negotiated and reckoned at a scale which allows for deeper issues to be addressed – this means local and national scale or magnitude of attention and resources to be focussed in at the hyper-scale (even if this is over a longer timeframe). However, some areas are deciding to operationalise

community planning / place planning at a meso-level which runs the risk of a dissipation of focus. A further aspect under this heading is that of *linkage* to other plans and strategies and for greater coordination of effort across areas, across topics and through time.

There are clearly problems over scope of particular forms of hyper-local planning, and this underscores the stubborn issue and long held view that siloed-thinking does not scan well at neighbourhood scale - apportioning responsibility or assigning one issue to one plan, strategy or partner can frustrate and disincentivise community actors.

#### **vi. Funding and resources**

There are several common threads which emerged around funding – targeted resources need not be huge for planning stages, indeed these are likely to be part of a long policy cycle (e.g. plans being produced every 5-10 years) and will only be a small fraction of budgets regularly spent on regeneration and wider planning activity across nations. There does need to be some prospect of implementation or adherence to such plans though and adequate resource for support and facilitation is important (as is the conditionality of such support - see below). Indeed, there is some evidence that plans at this scale can assist communities and other partners to attract funding, but little is known about what happens *after* such funds flow in (see further research below). The existence of evidence of need and prioritising of linked projects or other activity can obviously be useful for funders, but in instances where funds are allocated where neighbourhood planning has not been pursued or listened to there are questions about how well coordinated and effective the spend will be. In some cases, substantial external funding and top-down plan-making have produced polished strategies (aligned with national frameworks) but appear to have privileged physical regeneration over everyday social needs articulated by residents, or even overridden priorities in community-led plans.

#### **vii. Support and facilitation**

It is apparent that communities do need support and facilitation, and moreover that the basis for such support is also important. The cases demonstrate how support needs to retain independence, and the terms of engagement need to be agreed in the first place – lest agendas be preset and organised to suit funders or other institutional actors. Supporting residents in developing or benefitting from skills to carry out and present evidence, through community research, could help build trust and credibility with decision makers. This brings into view how a

need for co-production of the process at source is apparent, and as much as co-production of content or priority development later on.

This in turn speaks to the need for effective intermediaries as critical support and facilitators who can help bridge across issues, actors and other barriers to produce plans that are appropriate and effective – in essence that the plans provide a platform and statement that truly speaks for that neighbourhood. In this way, understanding of the frailties of co-production should be recognised and requires curation.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

Findings drawn from the research tend to reinforce pre-existing knowledge of the dynamics of ‘community-led’ planning activity in some respects. Focussing specifically on more deprived areas has delivered greater specificity, and prompted ideas for future action. There is clearly much goodwill for positive neighbourhood scale planning to take place, but in deprived areas there is less take-up and greater support and incentives or ‘guarantees’ are required.

The findings go further than prior work in three areas: first, emphasising a particular need for greater shared ownership of planning process, specifically linking this with prescribed actions and the need to co-own issues and solutions. Second, obstacles to participation which are more pronounced in deprived areas have been revealed. Third, we have derived lessons about positive features and practices associated with CLP that we feel need to be sustained and extended.

While the UK nations differ, and local experiences feature distinctive nuances of approach and plan content, what becomes evident is a disjointed and indirect effort to address questions of justice, equity, deprivation or inclusion at this scale. Several factors are in play here – bounded rationality leading to a fragmented approach to neighbourhood scale planning is one. In many areas it seems that a focus on immediate quality of life concerns prevails. This issue must be recognised, and some institutional actors seem to display a desire to write policy that can be ‘deliverable’ over a plan’s duration or funding cycle rather than keep deeper challenges and issues in clear view. We argue that unless issues and related actions/policies are clearly oriented to tackle the known problems of an area, then much may be lost from view, or be otherwise sidelined.

Despite the existence of indices which act as important benchmarks, some plans, while claiming to be partnered by communities, or even portrayed as community-led, are still overseen and largely authored by institutional actors (e.g. local authorities, or consultants briefed by LAs), or are shaped pre-conditionally via a narrow focus or subjected to other tests of legitimacy (i.e. ‘growth’ oriented in the case of NDPs, or limited to physical development only).

The research highlights how few plans in areas of pronounced need address JEDI questions explicitly, and where they do engage with related policy concerns and priorities, this lacks co-ordination and can appear *ad hoc*. Moreover, there is less evidence of implementation and this crucial stage of planning activity is an important aspect that should be considered by policymakers.

Beyond the confines of neighbourhood scale planning there is a need for wider tools and policy to focus on delivering for deprived areas; how we organise (deliberate, prioritise and orchestrate) and fund public benefits through the planning system is one good case in point. There needs to be greater clarity of purpose regarding redistribution, for example, considering the role of existing tools such as Section 106 agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy<sup>4</sup> income in England.

It is worth also linking across to the concept of social value and associating this with our focus on social justice. Yet, while social value has been conceived as a means to highlight and promote positive gains for communities it is necessary that such gains are not achieved transactionally for other *perceived* losses, which speaks to the idea of retention and extension of forms of capital. Although communities are inherently heterogenous and may have divergent aspirations, appropriately designed and adequately resourced community engagement can, and does in some instances, distil areas of consensus and mutual benefit that might be considered key thresholds for community gain and greater mutual understanding.

This work highlights the lack of a ‘whole place’ view – including linkages to action and policies at a higher spatial tier. In many deprived neighbourhoods – as acknowledged by participants in this study – this would amount to a ‘warts and all’ account of issues, priorities and actions, with particular clarity about which actors or institutions are responsible for each action, and a clear path to accessing resources. This would prioritise and show linkages between policy and action in ways that would both address recognised indicators and reflect on the relationship between economic, social and environmental action.

This more expansive activity can help galvanise communities, aid cross-issues reconciliation and could then lead to better action planning and further targeted work if an area feels it important to develop a more formal plan, or to better orchestrate inputs to higher tier plan-

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<sup>4</sup> s106 agreements are legal agreements between developers and local planning authorities which may include commitments to social or affordable housing and other community gains from new development. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) refers to monies are collected by local authorities in England and then used to fund community investment projects (see: <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/planning/policy-and-legislation/CIL/about-CIL> ).

making and other resource holders – either for project or grant monies or to steer their priorities to meet neighbourhood need better.

Excising matters because they are ‘not in scope’ runs the risk of displacing issues and creating further mistrust. In part, because of the risk of misalignment with lived experience of place and associated lack of effort to reconcile issues with actions or explain difficult choices. Key institutional partners such as local and national government need to rethink what planning at scale means in terms of ‘deliverability’ and how issue recognition and reconciliation is maintained. Over-riding concerns about the ability to deliver on the issues identified can act to block issue recognition / inscription regardless of their immediate ‘deliverability’ over a financial year or budget lifecycle.

Clearly, *procedural justice is not the same as substantive justice – but inscriptive justice is a crucial step from the former to the latter*, keeping the importance and relevance of specified policy objectives and projects in view across silos and through the hierarchy of policy and time frames and priorities of resourcing is needed.

### ***Implications for future research***

Given the research suggests a need for policies that better reflect the everyday conceptions of justice held by communities, this section discusses the implications of the findings for understanding justice in community-led planning.

- Future studies could explore in more depth the ‘authenticity’ of community-led plans and the influence of planning professionals and wider boundary pressures (such as local plans, national policy overrides) on their content
- There is potential for further research on how different institutional contexts affect community engagement and planning outcomes: identifying where decision points are, what factors are involved in decisions made and by whom would also aid a wider understanding of how power influences justice – this speaks to the differences across nations and how policy, funding, and support changes over time
- Work looking specifically at how town boards work with communities, and the role or absence of hyper-local planning seems appropriate - given the emerging PiPP arrangements; and the degree to which such board arrangements amplify, extend or negate the aspirations of prior community-led planning initiatives

- Work that collates and assesses all layers and parallel policy for an area for ‘whole place’ reviews would prove useful - both to consider duplication and alignment, and reflect on institutional approaches
- Future research could seek to understand the conflict that has been identified in this and other research studies between economic priorities (including housing targets) and community priorities and whether there are opportunities for win-wins, or greater compromises, and to what extent decisions made actually help the local economy
- Work to explore the role of community assets in providing space for participation, their relationship to levels of trust, and whether they could be leveraged to capture quality engagement data.

### ***Policy and practice recommendations***

The types of planning offered differ across the nations. Each has its own strengths, specificities and deficiencies when assessed against our frame of reference. Common issues are apparent and therefore lend themselves to policy and practice recommendations.

We have geared these to confront current policy landscapes and present a set of eight recommendations, which cover plan scope, clarity and inscription, and communication - as well as recognising the critical role of intermediary actors such as community development professionals, Planning Aid professionals and social enterprise consultants – working alongside community leaders, citizens and local government.

Our recommendations are accompanied by some explanation regarding their operability and ownership. They should be regarded as a set which, to varying degrees, would need to be addressed together.

1. **Examine terms of engagement and scope of hyper-local plans** – these should be co-produced and mutually agreed, not, as is usually the case, imposed by national and local governments. The merit of allowing more expansive work which considers both ‘service’ issues as well as economic and physical development priorities works with the tacit understandings of residents. The reasoning here is that pre-determining what and how a plan will cover and be prepared constrains voice from below and can reproduce top-down solutions. This also speaks to a need for greater institutional embeddedness for forms of citizen participation

**Who needs to listen:** budget holders and those commissioning plans and engagement work – notably local authorities but also national governments. National governments are additionally crucial in establishing policy spaces for hyper-local plans.

2. Much learning has been gleaned from the past, but too little has been woven into policy and policy tools iteratively. We argue that **existing neighbourhood planning tools can be usefully amended or repurposed** - as very local planning can both inform and develop objectives that are co-produced, helping to orchestrate issues and actions that are understood and owned by all the process of community-led planning is as valuable as the plan itself. Our research shows that this is possible but not routinely encouraged or integrated into local policy, which is often perceived by residents to take little account of past community activity. The existing mechanisms of place plans in their current forms need sufficient status (see below) to assist effectively with wider agenda-setting and deployment of hyper-local evidence

**Who needs to listen:** national governments should look at how place planning can be effective in conveying bottom-up knowledges and evidence, tying the range of issues and reflecting a ‘total place’ approach.

3. Ensure that the plans actually **inscribe the issues being faced** at scale and make clear linkages from issues to policy to implementation / action. Clear communication back to communities about how institutional actors can respond should form part of the process. This breaks open a limiting factor of ‘deliverability’ as plans should show what needs to be tackled as well as what is seen as achievable in a shorter frame. Going deeper than the statistics that define these neighbourhoods as deprived, communities should be aided to undertake community research to capture hyper local information as to why issues are present

**Who needs to listen:** neighbourhood planners, intermediaries and national government all need to be aware and ensure that advice and guidance encourages this.

4. Community-led plans could be given **greater status** as repositories of aims, issues and priorities and feed into other plans such as NDPs but also inform Pride in Place type spend, as well as being useful for informing many stakeholders, including health and policing. Overall, this might be achieved by ensuring that they have to be accounted for in any decisions by the public sector affecting the neighbourhood, for example via local

development plans and regeneration strategies with greater transparency over how such plans and strategies address issues presented in hyper-local place plans. At present they are too often paid lip service, but not fully considered by decision-makers

**Who needs to listen:** national governments in their policies relating to local place policy across departmental lines and local authorities when formulating and integrating policy horizontally and vertically.

5. **Resource intermediaries** with neutral positioning vis-a-vis institutional actors and community interests, explicitly recognising that communities need (paid for) support in plan-making processes. This recommendation builds from experience of organisations and social enterprise consultancies, for example, Planning Aid England, Scotland and Wales, and Community Places NI who have amassed a great deal of relevant experience but are limited by budget capacity. These are important facilitators who can bridge between expert and lay actors to provide maximum useability of ‘place plans’

**Who needs to listen:** national governments as budget holders should recognise the importance of such bridging organisations and fund them accordingly<sup>5</sup>.

6. **Recognise that there are community assets and leaders present within communities** and ensure that they are supported to work effectively on plans and community-led implementation with others (for instance in relation to R5 above) with local authorities and support organisations. This speaks to a recognition of the important role of non-elected, as well as elected, citizens in mobilising and directing the voice of neighbourhood residents and the limits of extensive participation as opposed to those who can maintain community voice through a process. Community assets play an important role in community planning activity, being trusted spaces where residents feel able to express themselves and participate. Again, there is a question here about how community leaders and assets can be supported and funded in their efforts in plan making and implementation

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<sup>5</sup> More on this aspect of support organisations was discussed in Parker, G. and Street, E. (2018). *Enabling Participatory Planning*. (Bristol: Policy Press).

**Who needs to listen:** support organisations and local authorities in shaping engagement spaces and support arrangements.

7. **Responsible agency and greater reflective practice** – partnering R1 and R6 above, those tasked with supporting, co-producing or overseeing neighbourhood scale planning should be mindful of how their inputs and actions affect longer term morale or likely future engagement of residents. Community-led planning can demand a lot from communities, particularly key volunteers, and local authorities do not always appear to recognise this. Clear lines of responsibility, communication and equitable relations are needed to sustain a long-term set of beneficial co-production

**Who needs to listen:** local authorities and other institutional actors engaging with residents as volunteers and participants.

8. Government could consider trialling **special planning status and associated arrangements** for more deprived neighbourhood areas – for example using PiPP areas (or NRAs in NI) as a start. This represents one way forward to ensure that a long-term total place perspective is brought to bear and that co-produced plans and priority statements are used to instil greater community ownership. This should feature mandated community-led planning in those areas and powers to enable prioritised actions. The recommendation stems from established practices of intervention in the UK, where regeneration of larger areas is deemed necessary via development corporations and associated Simplified Planning Zone / Enterprise Zone arrangements, and goes a step further than past NRA type designation. We think that further work on how a neighbourhood scale zone could be devised which would complement programmes such as PiPP is needed with a view to shaping a social-economic regeneration space (rather than merely a deregulated area)

**Who needs to listen:** national governments when formulating regeneration plans and interventions for deprived areas

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## Annex I: Themes derived from the Literature review

### 1. Leadership, motivation and actors:

certainty agents  
 knowledge legacy  
 place history context  
 trust situation places within attachment  
 navigation setting leadership  
 ability change motivation  
 capacities skills information  
 facilitation

### 2. Resources / capacity / support:

relationships resource  
 assembly design communication  
 constraints inputs targeted  
 partnerships capacity time  
 support group skills interest  
 facilitation resources  
 institutional social  
 calibration

### 3. Co-production:

focus scope  
 private control  
 conflict trust management  
 outcome  
 sector inclusion motives  
 joint  
 visioning

### 4. Tools, frameworks, technologies:

limits  
 living enterprise  
 technology gap intermediary-actors  
 data control purpose tools  
 labs support identification photos  
 backcasting mobilisation community  
 arts context degrees  
 tech non-profit social role participatory  
 visualisation flexibility fit visioning outcome  
 orientation setting budgeting ongoing  
 engagement gentrification intermediaries

### 5. Just Planning / Justice:

inclusion  
 empowerment  
 control rules right  
 weakness value city development  
 communication central accountability  
 power justice relations innovation  
 support representativeness  
 social knowledge

### 6. Priorities and scope (inc. participant types):

minorities facilitation funding  
 use priorities  
 social tech differential parameters  
 barriers groups youth  
 legal knowledge  
 understanding  
 constraints

### 7. Politics:

state paternalism  
 division co-option  
 intra-community roles  
 identities  
 priorities

### 8. Power:

post-politicisation  
 control stakeholders validation  
 engagement instigators claims  
 motives  
 format representation  
 knowledge settings participation  
 contexts

### 9. Community assets and participation:

infrastructure focus property-led  
 rights scope  
 social imperfection participation  
 regeneration assets  
 public  
 institutions

## Annex II: Review framework and sampling

Table A1: JEDI content review framework

Structuring concept	Linked concept	Examples
<b>Justice</b>	<p><i>Social justice</i></p> <p><i>Spatial justice</i></p> <p><i>Environmental justice</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and quality of public services, social infrastructure, life opportunities, cultural events, employment opportunities, etc.</li> <li>• Locational disadvantages such as existence of ‘bad neighbour’ assets, anti-social or criminal behaviour, lack of pride or place attachment etc.</li> <li>• Environmental risks such as flooding, poor air quality, access to environmental goods such as open green spaces or natural resources, biodiversity initiatives, clean energy projects etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Equity</b>	<p><i>Equality</i></p> <p><i>Equity</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality issues of process (e.g. transparency), equal access and accessibility, gender equality initiatives, support for/engagement with marginalised communities, etc.</li> <li>• Issues tailored to needs of specific groups such housing for the elderly, facilities for young people, target health or economic programmes etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Deprivation</b>	<p><i>Deprivation</i></p> <p><i>Disadvantage</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of basic resources, facilities, amenities, and physical capital such as health services, schools, poor quality housing stock, lack of affordable housing, libraries, etc.</li> <li>• Wider factors or conditions that limit individual social mobility and individual opportunity such as a lack of institutional capital, local capacity, leadership, poor health and wellbeing outcomes, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusion</b>	<p><i>Inclusion</i></p> <p><i>Diversity</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of social capital, substantive issues such as inclusion of minority or marginalised groups, evidence of wider or targeted community engagement, etc.</li> <li>• Representation and presence of differences within a group (both those leading the processes and the wider community) such as differences in race, gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic background, etc.</li> </ul>

**Table A2: Sampling of neighbourhood scale plans**

Country	Data sources used	How the sample was constructed
<b>England</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locality (2024) list of communities undertaking a Neighbourhood Development Plan (based on UK Government data) Local Trust, and OCSI (2019) list of 'left behind neighbourhoods'</li> <li>• Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (2019)</li> </ul>	Identifying communities that were on "left behind" (Local Trust, and OCSI, 2019) and that resided in the 98 Local Authority areas within the top quintile (i.e. most deprived) and known to have undertaken Neighbourhood Planning (n= 321). This communities were then assessed against the IMD at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) to find those in the top quintile, n=45 plans
<b>Scotland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A desktop review of all Local Authorities in Scotland within the top 20% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to ascertain the number of communities in deprived areas undertaking Local Place Plans or similar CLPs.</li> <li>• Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (2020)</li> </ul>	All CLPs produced by communities located in the Local Authorities in Scotland within the top 20% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation were reviewed (n=30)
<b>Wales</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A desktop review of all Local Authorities in Wales to ascertain the number of communities undertaking Place Plans.</li> <li>• Planning Aid Wales data on Place Plan Activity.</li> <li>• Welsh Indices of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) (2019)</li> </ul>	A list of communities known to have completed or be undertaking a Place Plan was compiled using the desktop review and Planning Aid Wales' data (n= 32). Those communities with significant parts of the neighbourhood within the top quintile of WIMD (2019) LSOAs
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A desktop review of all Local Authorities in NI to assess the number of Community Plans and Place Plans.</li> <li>• Northern Ireland Indices of Multiple Deprivation (NIMDM, 2017)</li> </ul>	A list was developed to focus on the key areas of concern and in areas in top quintile of NIMDM. This embraced all existing finalised Place Plans in areas where higher levels of deprivation were present, some NRAs and the remainder of Community Plans. This approach gave us a total of 8 in scope local authority areas and 16 plans for review (6 Community Plans, 4 neighbourhood scale Place Plans and 6 NRA strategies

## Annex III: Example Neighbourhood Development Plans (England)

Table A3: NDP examples with IMD ranking

Plan / Date [Fund]	Online location / URL	Population, Area description / 2019 IMD rank
<b>1. Boscombe &amp; Pokesdown NDP / 2019</b>  [Towns Fund 2020]	<a href="http://www.boscombepokesdown.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/190812_BaPNPv15.pdf">http://www.boscombepokesdown.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/190812_BaPNPv15.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole</li> <li>• Population: 11,190 (2021)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Boscombe Central (E01017547) IMD rank: 528<sup>th</sup> / 32,844</li> <li>• Overall top 20% IMD, 'Left Behind Place', Coastal, Urban, Neighbourhood Forum</li> </ul>
<b>2. Braybrooke NDP / 2023</b>  [Adjacent to PiPP I area]	<a href="https://braybrooke-pc.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Braybrooke-Neighbourhood-Plan-Made-8-June-2023-Updated-03092023.pdf">https://braybrooke-pc.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Braybrooke-Neighbourhood-Plan-Made-8-June-2023-Updated-03092023.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: North Northamptonshire Council</li> <li>• Population: 409 (2021)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Kettering 001C (E01027129), overall 7<sup>th</sup> decile.</li> <li>• Top 10% IMD for Barriers to housing and services</li> <li>• Rural, Parished</li> </ul>
<b>3. Bridport NDP / 2020</b>  [not PiPP I]	<a href="https://www.bridport-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/BANP-final-version_web.pdf">https://www.bridport-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/BANP-final-version_web.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Authority: Dorset Council</li> <li>• Population 12,207 (2021)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Bridport CO (E01020499)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 6,009<sup>th</sup> / 32,844</li> <li>• Top 20% IMD, Coastal, Rural, Parished</li> </ul>
<b>4. Colne NDP / 2023</b> [not PiPP I]	<a href="https://www.pendle.gov.uk/downloads/file/11604/colne_neighbourhood_development_plan_2022-2030">https://www.pendle.gov.uk/downloads/file/11604/colne_neighbourhood_development_plan_2022-2030</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Authority: Pendle Borough Council</li> <li>• Population: 18,908 (2021)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Pendle 006A (E01023880)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 677<sup>th</sup> / 32,844</li> <li>• Top 10% IMD, Urban, Parished</li> </ul>
<b>5. Cramlington NDP / 2019</b>  [not PiPP I]	<a href="https://www.cramlingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Cramlington-NP-Referendum-Plan-Draft-FINAL-2.pdf">https://www.cramlingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Cramlington-NP-Referendum-Plan-Draft-FINAL-2.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: Northumberland County Council</li> <li>• Population: 28,843 (2011)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Northumberland 029D (E01027412)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 2,162<sup>nd</sup> / 32,844</li> <li>• Top 10% IMD, Coastal, Urban, Parished</li> </ul>
<b>6. Gainsborough NDP / 2021</b>  [PiPP I 2025]	<a href="https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-02/Gainsborough%20Neighbourhood%20Plan%20-%20Final%20Referendum%20Version%20%284%29.pdf">https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-02/Gainsborough%20Neighbourhood%20Plan%20-%20Final%20Referendum%20Version%20%284%29.pdf</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: West Lindsey District Council</li> <li>• Population: 18,510 (2021)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: West Lindsey 006A (E01026374)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 1,547<sup>th</sup> / 32,844</li> <li>• Top 10% IMD, 'Left Behind Place', Urban, Parished</li> </ul>

<p><b>7. Great Aycliffe NDP / 2017</b></p> <p>[not PiPP I]</p>	<p><a href="https://www.great-aycliffe.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Full-Plan-Referendum-Version.pdf">https://www.great-aycliffe.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Full-Plan-Referendum-Version.pdf</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: Durham County Council</li> <li>• Population: 26,633 (2011)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: School Aycliffe (E01020846)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 8,939th / 32,844</li> <li>• Urban, Parished</li> <li>• Top 30% IMD overall, top 10% employment and barriers to housing</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. March NDP / 2017</b></p> <p>[not PiPP I]</p>	<p><a href="https://www.marchtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/March-Neighbourhood-Plan-Adopted.pdf">https://www.marchtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/March-Neighbourhood-Plan-Adopted.pdf</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: Fenland District Council</li> <li>• Population: 22,298 (2011)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Fenland 007b (E01018078)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 3,174th / 32,844</li> <li>• Top 10% IMD, Urban, Parished</li> </ul>
<p><b>9. Growing together NE Northampton NDP / 2017</b></p> <p>[Towns Fund 2021]</p>	<p><a href="https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-planning-activity-west-northamptonshire">https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-planning-activity-west-northamptonshire</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: West Northants Council</li> <li>• Population: 9,100 (2011 est. - grouping of neighbourhoods)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Northampton 017E (E01027244)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 1,398th / 32,844</li> <li>• Top 10% IMD, Urban, Neighb. Forum</li> </ul>
<p><b>10. Spring Boroughs NDP / 2016</b></p> <p>[Towns Fund 2021]</p>	<p><a href="https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-planning-activity-west-northamptonshire">https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-planning-activity-west-northamptonshire</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: West Northants Council</li> <li>• Population: 2,674 (2011)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Northampton 011A (E01027140)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 185th / 32,844</li> <li>• Top 10% IMD, Urban, Neighb. Forum</li> </ul>
<p><b>11. Stainforth NDP / 2024</b></p> <p>[Towns Fund 2021; +Doncaster has PiPP I 2025]</p>	<p><a href="https://www.stainforthneighbourhoodplan.org.uk/files/ugd/5d24ac_8c0e611957ed46e69adf079a56bed5e3.pdf?index=true">https://www.stainforthneighbourhoodplan.org.uk/files/ugd/5d24ac_8c0e611957ed46e69adf079a56bed5e3.pdf?index=true</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LPA: Doncaster City Council</li> <li>• Population: 6,380 (2021)</li> <li>• Centroid LSOA: Doncaster 007E (E01007630)</li> <li>• IMD rank: 793rd / 32,844</li> <li>• Top 10% IMD, 'Left Behind Place', Rural, Parished</li> </ul>

## Annex IV: England context and cases

### Community and Neighbourhood Planning in England

The focus of our review has been post-2010 and, since its inception in late 2010 and its formal basis in the 2011 Localism Act (amended in the 2017 Act) and 2012 regulations, Neighbourhood Planning (NP) in England has prompted a substantial amount of attention in both planning practice and academia with numerous outputs discussing the design and operation of the policy (see Parker *et al.*, 2023). Individuals' motivations for participating in NP are complex (Cao and Sturzaker, 2022) but also inextricably linked to the broader neighbourhood's socio-economic, cultural, and political make-up. Against this backdrop, take-up in urban and deprived areas has been low, whilst overall take-up of the policy has also dropped (Parker *et al.*, 2020).

The recorded higher take-up of neighbourhood development plans (NDPs) in affluent and rural neighbourhoods (Defra, 2013; Vigar, 2013; Parker and Salter, 2016, 2017; Parker *et al.*, 2020) has been accompanied by ongoing pessimism about the ability of NP to promote local regeneration in the most deprived areas, particularly those that lack market interest and development opportunities (Bailey and Pill, 2014). Conversely, there are examples of innovation as a positive outcome of NPs (Neighbourhood Planning), for example, interest in community-led initiatives such as community land trusts, self and custom-build projects, co-housing, and other models (Field and Layard, 2017), preserving local architecture and heritage and the production of design codes (Wargent, 2021), and linking consultation exercises to cultural events that explore issues of local representation in (Cowie, 2017).

Despite alterations to support that have been made over the past few years, including improved funding for deprived areas (MHCLG, 2020), it still needs to be discovered how these changes have helped uptake in deprived areas. The above has led to calls for sustained funding for direct professional involvement in NP to maintain the policy's efficacy (McGuinness and Ludwig, 2017; Wargent and Parker, 2018; Parker *et al.*, 2023).

A number of barriers to NP have been recognised in the literature, firstly in urban areas are often overlaid on complex social fabrics, instigating a plan can entrench local divisions and fuel existing conflicts, particularly in diverse neighbourhoods (Colomb, 2017). For those able and willing to participate, the literature also points to significant burdens (Parker *et al.*, 2015; Parker

*et al.*, 2020). Anticipation of the effort involved in NP may produce a collective action problem (Holman and Rydin, 2013). Key issues faced by volunteers included understanding technical issues, navigating the regulatory hoops, and learning ‘planning speak’ and writing policy (Parker *et al.*, 2014). Concerns have also been expressed over the politicisation of voluntary effort (Parker *et al.*, 2021) and the burdens involved in neighbourhood planning, both of which point to ensuring appropriate support - from both LPAs (local planning authorities) but also consultants and other advisors (Parker *et al.*, 2015; 2017). Such issues are also linked to a need for more information, support, or orientation (Bradley and Sparling, 2017) and motivation to participate when other priorities exist (Parker *et al.*, 2020).

Existing research shows remarkable consistency across identified issues and barriers to participation in deprived areas and in proposed solutions. Much of the latter is directed toward levers controlled by national government. Local Authority support has been widely recognised as crucial to successful NP, but this has proven uneven and complicated at a time of stretched local government resources; LPAs are expected to ‘do more with less’ and resourcing issues have been exacerbated by contradictory priorities from central government (Ludwig and Ludwig, 2014). The degree of support offered by Local Planning Authority officers, varies, partly due to the attitude of local councillors, with negative responses ranging from disinterest to hostility (Sturzaker *et al.*, 2022), producing a range of LPA responses to NP (Salter, 2022).

Discussion of reforms in specific localities, and considering local context, is typically overlooked in the above literature. There are questions regarding hidden costs (Inch, 2015) in terms of time inputs and financial costs beyond that allowed for in support grant allowances. These may be higher in some situations (larger neighbourhoods or those that need more support or resources to mobilise action/involvement (see Dobson and Parker, 2025 on volunteer exploitation). Local plan status and uncertainty over implementation and the primacy of plans (Parker and Wargent, 2017; Parker *et al.*, 2020).

The Locality report *People Power* (2018), called for an extension of ‘the powers which can be designated to neighbourhood forums in non-parished areas’ (2018, p.19). Secondly the role of Neighbourhood Forums more widely has been not only to prepare a plan but to act as a focal point for community and for the local authority to engage with community. Research with a focus on Neighbourhood Forums in London (i.e. urban), produced a review of NP and highlighted a need for training both for officers and elected members, to hone the duty to support and to

ensure better support for communities across the stages of NDP production as well as improving the funding arrangements for Forums (London Assembly, 2020).

Research has raised questions over NP's representativeness (Davoudi and Cowie, 2013), legitimacy (Gunn *et al.*, 2015), and possible 'double exclusion' where NP runs a risk of excluding already marginalised groups (Parker, 2008) - inclusionary methods are therefore essential and to ensure NPs are a true reflection of community wishes (Wills, 2016). Colomb (2017), looking at difficulties of operationalising purportedly community scale action, points to extra barriers where hyper-diversity exists.

Some Plans appear to 'double up' on local plan policies rather than creating innovative and value-adding policy (Brookfield, 2017). Other research shows that some communities' plans reveal a modest scope and conservative positions in anticipation of a legal challenge (Parker *et al.*, 2015), or apparent lack of issue awareness given some coverage of NPs (Lee *et al.*, 2022). Some communities have found their NPs limited by officers, consultants, and examiners (Parker *et al.*, 2016), acting to encourage 'norm enforcement' (Parker *et al.*, 2017).

Evidence on the ability of NP to deliver new housing is particularly patchy (Lichfields, 2016; DCLG, 2016) and particularly hard to calculate; however, assorted studies have found new development to be better tailored to local needs (Parker *et al.*, 2020; Salter *et al.*, 2022). Conversely some evidence has indicated a promising concentration on 'socially inclusive' growth and sustainable housebuilding with a social purpose (Bradley and Sparling, 2017; Bradley *et al.*, 2017), but this remains limited, other NDPs focus on locally relevant locations, housing mix, occupancy, and design (Bailey, 2017). Some have considered that the take-up and focus of NDP activity is not delivering socially inclusive and environmentally just outcomes (e.g., Gunn and Vigar, 2015).

Several reports have made recommendations relating to NP, notably the 2014 User Experience of Neighbourhood Planning research (Parker *et al.*, 2014; Parker *et al.*, 2015), which identified recommendations including clarity over the duty to support placed on LPAs, simplification of the process of designation stages (subsequently addressed), and clearer messaging regarding the future role and status of NDPs. A further national study into Neighbourhood Planning impacts set out a long list of aspects for attention (Parker *et al.*, 2020), including, among other things:

- **Support** for NP – particularly funding and targeting that could be better directed, including aiding the relationship between the LPA and neighbourhoods

- Uneven **uptake** – lower take-up in urban deprived communities
- **Scoping** – possible triaging of local issues and use of appropriate tools to address them
- **Training** - for local planning officers and community leaders about the NP process and critical skills
- Relationship with **Local Plans** to improve clarity and guidance in terms of data, linkage, value-adding and sequencing to help with improving outcomes overall
- Place-making and **participation** – to nestle NP activity into broader agendas and concerns and to build from pre-existing activity
- **Knowledge exchange** – particularly sharing experience and support across neighbourhoods and LPAs

The relationship between the local plan and the production of a NDP is also recognised as bearing on the time taken and the likelihood of take-up, with better integration and cooperation required. Publica (2019) also focused on urban and deprived areas in London, they identified four areas for action, set across:

- **Process** - improvements to aid neighbourhoods in navigating the complexities of formal planning
- **Mainstreaming** or integration of NP activity – particularly about local plans and broader agendas
- **Funding** arrangements and alignment that recognise diverse needs
- **Support** improvements and fostering capacity in neighbourhoods (and local authorities)

The Locality report *People Power* (2018) called for an extension of “*the powers which can be designated to neighbourhood forums in non-parished areas*” (2018, p.19). Tomaney *et al.* (2024), in work which focusses on left behind places<sup>1</sup> and the social infrastructures and place attachments involved in ‘left behind’ areas, put the case that historic attachments and particular buildings and their uses as ‘community assets’ are very important to foster hope and collective endeavour.

In another recent piece of work looking at Middlesbrough conducted by Lynn *et al.* (2023), findings in that work resonate with much of the existing empirical evidence concerning NP in England and themes that appear in the wider literature review, where LA support, targeted resources and other issues of disillusionment or attending to ‘pressing matters’ have impacted on NP take-up. In that work, reasons for undertaking or not undertaking NP were not *necessarily*

linked to a lack of awareness of policy tools (i.e. neighbourhood planning) and there was evidence of an appetite for NP and moreover, some understanding of its limits. There remains some uncertainty though about what NP can achieve and more importantly how it sits in terms of (wider) perceived social and environmental need. This has been a pervasive concern in NP and wider CLP scholarship; that the terms and scope of NP do not mirror the issues and challenges faced by local people; even in terms of the built and natural environment, let alone questions far beyond that range of considerations (e.g. education, crime, health).

Prior experience of engagement in planning and development within wards was influential, with some sections of the population in Middlesbrough showing cynicism about policy and policymakers, stemming from previous initiatives (such as City Challenge). There was a perceived lack of support – both in terms of local authority support - and concerns about the capacity of council officers’ availability to assist meaningfully. This fed into a broader feeling of ‘top down’ management rather than ‘bottom up’ empowerment or collaborative exchange. In what appears as a theme in the wider literature review, the message of community control advocated by the central government appeared not to have reached the participants. **Peer** support in both the participating and non-participating areas – was seen as helpful, and the development of a formal support network and shared resources was backed.

Fear of retribution was a new issue identified within that research; concerns were voiced from some that property owners might find out about the involvement of tenants in planning matters, potentially inducing an adverse reaction that could risk current living arrangements. Some concerns about reaction to NP involvement and outcomes were also detected in national studies (Parker *et al.*, 2014; 2020) but these derived from concerns over inter-community tensions if, for example, new development was encouraged by neighbourhood plan proponents (and which chimes with identified intra-community conflict as an issue in the literature review).

### ***The English Context***

Previous experimentation with community governance have been widely reported (see Dillon and Fanning, 2016; Pill, 2012; Sullivan, 2001) and several waves of community-based policy focussing on ‘regeneration’ has featured in England, including the Single Regeneration Budget (see, Rhodes *et al.*, 2007; Baeten, 2000), City Challenge (Davoudi, 1995) and New Deal for Communities (Lawless and Pearson, 2012). A wide literature has accounted for such initiatives. The New Deal was supposed to be led by locally informed strategies designed to improve

conditions within deprived neighbourhoods and the results were deemed to be mixed –many lessons learned and successful projects supported, yet with little, longer term change identifiable when compared to non-participating areas. Instead, the programme has been said to feature

*“greater control from central government, diminishing community interest in the initiative, and over-optimistic assumptions on the part of local residents as to what the programme could ever achieve”* (Lawless and Pearson, 2012, p.509).

None of the initiatives from the past thirty years have programmed involved input to the formal planning system, apart from influencing national policy orientation. This has been a recurring theme where a divorce of planning and development from wider regeneration efforts is seen as a consistent issue, even though much emphasis has been placed on ‘property-led’ regeneration (Carley, 2010; Raco, 2000). There were elements of urban and rural governance that were supposed to inform or influence local authority policy, such as Community Strategies from 2000 (see Lambert, 2006; Raco *et al.*, 2006) which, in an indirect fashion, were to influence local level planning activity (Baker, Hincks and Sheriff, 2010; Dobson and Parker, 2023), yet this was, in practice, limited.

This is one reason why so much interest has been sustained in neighbourhood planning (NP), as it offered a degree of citizen control over local policy, albeit constrained by national policy guidance and limited formally to land use planning. As a result, a substantial literature has developed over the past decade considering NP in England. As might be expected, this overview features considerable detail of the design, operation and experience of the NP policy since 2011 (see also Parker *et al.*, 2023 for a detailed account - and see [Annex II](#) for an overview of similar tools across UK).

Given there is now a long history of deprived area policy many potential case areas in England (and across the nations) are likely to have experienced previous policy interventions 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. In recognition of the volunteer and cost burdens in producing NDPs, neighbourhood priority statements (NPS) were trialled from 2023 and one case, discussed below, did pursue that option. While the NDP is offered-up as being community-led, in practice many areas make use of

consultants to assist, while also relying on their local planning authority for support and to ensure statutory compliance (along with an appointed neighbourhood plan examiner). More context on neighbourhood planning in England can be found in JN working paper #3 (and see Parker *et al.*, 2023 for a full review), and this set of conditions can produce a range of ‘co-production’ relations. In some instances, control has been substantively commandeered by LPAs and consultants, in others a more genuine effort to co-produce has been maintained (Sturzaker *et al.*, 2022; Parker *et al.*, 2017; Sendra and Fitzpatrick, 2020).

### Doncaster case summaries

The two case studies in Doncaster are two ex-mining villages situated on the outskirts of Doncaster, which have experienced socio-economic decline since local pit closures. Stainforth has a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) and Conisbrough and Denaby Main have developed a community-led plan for the Craggs (a green space), and a variety of community-led projects have responded to challenges local people face, including community gardens, coffee shops, food/resource banks, library with additional services.

A practitioner working within the Doncaster locality approach reflected on the importance of building relationships when engaging communities facing long-term disadvantage. They noted that meaningful participation often depends on sustained local presence and trusted intermediaries who understand the area: *“People are more likely to trust someone who knows the community and understands what life is like here”* (DON1). Within the Well Doncaster approach, locality workers embedded within neighbourhoods are intended to act as liaison between residents and the council. This model recognises that communities are often more willing to engage when conversations are facilitated by people who are familiar with local conditions and relationships.

At the same time, respondents highlighted that engagement processes can become strained where communities feel that their contributions do not meaningfully shape decisions. One community leader reflected on the frustrations that can arise when expectations raised through participatory processes are not realised: *“Injustice is hard to fight... there’s such a disconnect... it’s infuriating”* (ST1). Another respondent emphasised that progress depends on clearer communication between communities and institutions: *“There needs to be clarity about responsibilities and ownership”* (CDM7).

Taken together, these reflections suggest that while local authorities recognise the importance of engagement and have begun to invest in more relational approaches through locality working,

significant challenges remain. In communities shaped by long-term economic change and repeated policy interventions, trust can be fragile and expectations difficult to manage.

### Stainforth, Doncaster

Stainforth is a former coal-mining community located approximately seven miles from Doncaster town centre, with a population of 6,282. Since the closure of Hatfield Colliery in 2015, the area has experienced deepening socio-economic disadvantages and became progressively more deprived between 2014 and 2019. Income deprivation affects 20.2% of residents, compared with 16.6% across Doncaster and 12.9% nationally, while 29.5% of children live in poverty. Life expectancy is significantly lower than borough and England averages, with inequalities particularly marked in healthy life expectancy: residents are expected to experience around seven fewer healthy years than the national norm.

In this context, neighbourhood planning emerged as a significant vehicle through which residents sought to articulate spatial justice claims and shape regeneration. Initiated in 2016 and published in 2024, the Stainforth Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) was among the most explicitly justice-oriented found across the study sample, combining high levels of participation with an ambitious, pro-development vision focused on heritage protection, housing choice, improved connectivity, expanded green space and new community facilities. The area is in receipt of a Towns Fund grant of £21.6m, and notably a large-scale development, the Unity Regeneration Project, is underway.

**Figure 3a, b: Front cover of the Stainforth Neighbourhood Development Plan / Mining headstocks and warehouse**



A proposed Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO), intended to secure a country park and protect the former pithead and surrounding land, became a focal point for NDP ambitions. A community leader involved in the development of the plan asserted that for their village “*Planning for justice involves the protection of heritage.*” (Interview ST1).

The NDOs eventual abandonment, however, marked a turning point in local confidence, with claims that “*the developer has diverted democracy*” (Interview ST2a). Respondents pointed to tensions between heritage-led community aspirations and growth-driven regeneration priorities, alongside local councillors having a limited understanding about the power they held over the future of the area and the scope and potential of NP. Subsequent development around the headstocks, particularly the construction of a large warehouse (described by residents as acting as a modern “bund”) physically separates the settlement from its industrial past, and intensified perceptions that community priorities had been overridden and disrespected. For many, this symbolised a deeper injustice in which heritage, identity and resident voice were marginalised, despite plan commitments to protect strategic views and historic assets.

Although the NDP helped leverage Towns Fund investment, interviewees increasingly perceived that decision-making power had shifted away from the community and toward external actors, including developers and higher tiers of governance, particularly given the large funds being made available. Questions about why communities are not trusted with pots of funding were raised. This disjuncture generated frustration among local volunteers who had sustained the neighbourhood planning process over many years, leading some to question whether the burdens of neighbourhood planning were justified by its outcomes (resonating with past research on NP). The experience also revealed tensions within local governance structures, with political change and internal divisions shaping how far the neighbourhood plan’s ambitions would actually be carried forward in practice.

At the same time, the Stainforth case demonstrates that formal neighbourhood planning can mobilise significant civic energy when enabling conditions are present. A committed local leader, skilled intermediaries and constructive relationships with planning officers were widely credited with sustaining participation and translating community priorities into policy form. Yet these conditions proved insufficient to overcome wider power asymmetries across the development and political system. As a result, the case highlights how neighbourhood planning in post-industrial communities may succeed in articulating visions of justice and regeneration, while still struggling to secure long-term influence over strategic land decisions.

### *Conisbrough and Denaby Main, Doncaster*

Conisbrough and Denaby Main have experienced long-term deprivation, with Denaby Main being the most deprived area in Doncaster (IMD 2019). Residents repeatedly described a strong sense of loss following mine closures and the disappearance of welfare clubs, social activities and shared collective life that had once anchored the communities. Although no neighbourhood plan is in place, local people have attempted to shape regeneration through community-led initiatives, most notably a plan for the Craggs, a valued historic green space between the two settlements. Interviewees reported frustration that subsequent council-led planning for funding allocation did not sufficiently build on this work, reinforcing **perceptions that community knowledge was marginalised**.

**Figure 4a, b: Conisbrough & Denaby Main images**



At the same time, Well Doncaster was widely recognised for sustained engagement in the area and for feeding community priorities into council systems. However, respondents stressed that co-production remains fragile and unless there are **clearer responsibilities, open communication channels and feedback loops** are established, people are likely to remain disengaged. Limited capacity within the voluntary sector further constrains momentum. One social-enterprise leader described operating at breaking point: “I am at make or break... I may not be around to advocate for the community because I have to go to work” (Interview COLL3).

Large-scale infrastructure proposals have further shaped local attitudes toward planning. Campaigning against the Whitestone solar farm, a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project affecting views from Conisbrough Castle and surrounding green space, intensifies feelings of disenfranchisement, particularly where residents perceived that **national decision-makers do** not visit the area or engage directly with those affected by the proposals. Although Doncaster Council formally opposed the scheme, this experience is reinforcing scepticism about whether local voices carry weight in major planning decisions.

## Middlesbrough case studies

The case studies in Middlesbrough reflect experiences of planning and neighbourhood policy across two inner-city wards facing the long-term consequences of industrial decline and top-down regeneration. Newport has a Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS) in place, and a large-scale regeneration project is currently taking place. North Ormesby has received investment through Big Local. Both wards have community hubs funded by Middlesbrough Council, are part of the neighbourhood (formerly Locality) model of working, and have active Selective Landlord Licensing (SLL) schemes in place.

A Middlesbrough council officer reflected on the difficulties of engaging residents in places facing multiple pressures: *“It’s hard to engage people when they’re dealing with day-to-day survival. Planning isn’t necessarily the thing at the top of their list”* (NO1). The importance of planning in shaping everyday quality of life in deprived neighbourhoods was also emphasised. A community mediator working with the local authority in North Ormesby, and also visiting Newport, raised the question of whether community engagement and community planning are goals in themselves or a by-product of stronger relationships within communities. As they explained: *“It is a by-product. If the community is connected and collaborative, then planning follows”* (NO4). However, as the council officer also recognised, rebuilding relationships with communities requires time and patience: *“It takes time to rebuild trust in communities that feel like they’ve been ‘done by’ before”* (NO1).

Taken together, these reflections illustrate a local authority perspective that recognises both the difficulty and importance of engagement in communities experiencing long-term disadvantages. They suggest that meaningful participation in planning cannot be separated from the broader challenge of rebuilding trust and strengthening relationships between institutions and residents. In this context, developing relational capacity, the ability of communities, practitioners and institutions to navigate difference, build understanding, and work collaboratively, is a crucial foundation for more effective forms of community-led planning. Importantly, this process requires trust-building to occur in both directions. Communities need to feel that their voices will influence decisions, while decision makers must be willing to recognise and work with the knowledge, leadership, and aspirations that already exist within neighbourhoods.

## Newport/Gresham, Middlesbrough

Newport (known locally as Gresham) is an inner-urban ward in Middlesbrough with a population of 10,776 (2021) and has experienced recent population decline. In 2019 it ranked as the 26th most deprived ward in England. Health inequalities are stark: 48% of deaths between 2001 and

2018 were classified as premature. Emergency hospital admissions, including for COPD, were higher than anywhere else in the borough, and rates of self-harm and poor mental health are elevated. Newport is also among the most challenged wards in Middlesbrough for antisocial behaviour, racially motivated incidents and overall crime. More than 2,500 children are estimated to be living in income-deprived households, while housing pressures remain visible, with over 7% of properties vacant in 2020 and a higher-than-average proportion of homes lacking central heating.

Newport bears a long history of decline and by the beginning of the century the area was characterised by poor street conditions and housing quality, perceived lack of safety, anti-social behaviour, neighbourhood tensions, drug dealing and usage, and a perceived lack of inclusion in decisions about the area (cf. Lynn *et al.*, 2023). Planned demolition of 561 homes in Newport began in 2010, with the land remaining vacant for over a decade. This prolonged vacancy contributed to both the physical decline of the area and has shaped local views about consultation and policy makers. It is from this backdrop where a major planning decision made, without agreement from the community, that perspectives on engagement in the planning system have been shaped over the past 20 years. Thus, **past experience** conditions action to some extent, one resident reflected on the lack of previous engagement in planning:

*“Having a neighbourhood plan for the area would make a difference if it was community informed... They will keep it and like it... we need to create that perception that people are being consulted and are part of the decisions at a lower level.”* (Interview GR6)

Attempts at action planning were made in 2016 and, more recently, in 2023 through the development of a Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS), which is a ‘lighter touch’ form of Neighbourhood Development Plan<sup>6</sup>). The 2016 Community Action Plan for Newport Ward was motivated by the recognition by a prominent community organisation that there was a lack of self-confidence and fear of being seen to stand out, and they recognised that most residents were not actively involved in community activities. Both the 2016 document and the NPS referenced the need to improve community safety and appearance, support cultural integration and improve housing quality. Many interviewees, unless directly involved in producing these

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<sup>6</sup> NPS’ are a policy response to uneven take up of neighbourhood plans across the country, intended to be a “simpler and more accessible way” for communities to set out their key priorities and preferences for their local areas. This is particularly targeted at communities in “urban and more deprived areas” which “face additional barriers” making it “more difficult for them to progress a neighbourhood plan,” (DLUHC, 2023 - LURA 2023, explanatory notes, para. 2212).

documents, were unaware of such plans, and there was little evidence that they had been used by decision-makers or influenced by neighbourhood-level action. As a result, the NPS has not altered local power relationships or improved confidence in the planning system and has instead contributed to scepticism about whether further neighbourhood planning activity would be worthwhile; given the burdens involved in producing these plans and the limited capacity available in the community.

**Figure 1a, b, c: Newport/Gresham Images**



There is local appetite for community-led planning in Newport; however, respondents highlighted that this would need to be grounded in:

- A clear commitment from decision-makers to use the plan as a reference point and give it priority in decision-making
- Efforts to build relational capacity across the area to overcome complex divisions within the community, and
- A creative, co-produced approach that engages those who would not usually participate

The issues faced in Newport are deeply rooted in the area's social infrastructure and shaped by long-standing deprivation, racial tensions and high levels of transience within the private rented sector. These conditions have weakened neighbourhood trust, limited feelings of ownership and made it difficult for effective forms of community-led planning to take hold. For those involved locally, it has been challenging to identify how formal planning tools can respond meaningfully to community concerns when the preconditions for participation, safety, cohesion and

confidence that engagement will actually influence outcomes are precarious. Greater relational capacity within the community, alongside sustained work to build understanding across cultural divides, appear to be further prerequisites for Newport residents to engage in neighbourhood planning in any sustained way.

Residents do want to be involved in shaping the future of their area, but this is set alongside deep uncertainty about whether their voices would be taken seriously. For those living in ‘survival mode,’ questions about what community-led planning could realistically achieve in improving their lives, remain unresolved. Respondents repeatedly emphasised the importance of trusted intermediaries (internally and externally), informal engagement, and co-produced approaches that meet people where they are, rather than relying on conventional consultation methods. In this respect, deliberative and facilitative approaches like those being developed through tools such as *LocalMotion* and associated ‘Deep Democracy’ training, were seen as offering a more promising foundation for rebuilding participation and supporting difficult conversations.

### **North Ormesby, Middlesbrough**

North Ormesby (‘Doggy’) is an inner-city ward in Middlesbrough that has experienced long-term deprivation and, in 2019, was ranked as the second most deprived ward in the country. Health disparities are pronounced, with 50% of deaths in the area classed as premature between 2001 and 2018. Respondents described a “hard environment to live in” shaped by poor housing quality, limited access to services, and high levels of violent crime, alongside visible everyday pressures such as addiction, littering and street-level anti-social behaviour (Interview NO9).

Although there has been no formal neighbourhood planning activity in North Ormesby, a Big Local Community Plan was developed in 2015 to guide the investment of just over £1 millions of National Lottery funding, with the programme running until December 2024. For some, the programme supported practical improvements and services, but others felt its impact was not widely felt or understood. Importantly, Big Local created spaces for collective voice, including partnership working and gave purpose to Community Council forums, and respondents noted these were missed once they ended, contributing to a sense that the neighbourhood had “reset”. One local resident spoke about the challenges local people face, feeling “downtrodden” and living the impact of decisions made without their input “*They’re living the impact every day, and then a decision comes along and it’s like... Why has nobody asked us?*” (Interview NO9).

**Figure 2a, b: North Ormesby images**

Across interviews, repeated waves of regeneration were often spoken about with fatigue and scepticism. One respondent reflected that deprivation indicators have remained largely unchanged over decades, despite major investment, and questioned why large-scale programmes and physical renewal have not shifted lived experience. In this context, justice was described not only in terms of material conditions, but also protection, safety and being listened to, particularly for young people and families. Questions of spatial injustice surfaced in everyday terms: who feels safe in public space, who is displaced, who is listened to when making decisions about community assets and who has access to safe places to meet, play and belong.

Alongside this, respondents described how misunderstanding and racial tension can constrain participation and make shared priority-setting difficult. Some noted a tendency for immigration to be framed as the primary injustice in local narratives and argued that “myth-busting” and confidence-building are necessary foundations for collaborative community action (Interview NO7c). Several also emphasised that language matters, and that jargon and inaccessible documents can reproduce exclusion, whereas plain English and trusted relationships can help unlock meaningful local knowledge and engagement.

Despite these constraints, North Ormesby also shows strong grassroots' capacity. Community Ventures (CVL) operates as a community anchor organisation in East Middlesbrough, offering embedded housing and wraparound support for people with complex needs, significantly and intimately improving the quality of life for ‘clients.’ Alongside this, residents have led micro-scale place-making that has had tangible impacts: an alleyway regeneration project (murals, planting, shared games and lighting) has improved neighbourly connection and pride, and residents were described as protective of the project, rather than seeing it re-branded by political actors. The community-led regeneration of Henry Street Park similarly shows commitment and stamina but also illustrates how difficult it is to sustain resident-led projects without consistent institutional backing, particularly when vandalism and repair responsibilities are left unresolved.

## Annex V: Scotland context and cases

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 lays out the policy foundations for Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) to form Local Outcomes Improvement Plans (LOIPs) (replacing traditional community plans that cover a whole council area) and locality plans, with specific attention to localities where people residing there experience significantly poorer outcomes which result from socio-economic disadvantage. In 2015, the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee carried out an inquiry into the Community Empowerment Act 2015, where it was found that CPPs experienced various barriers, such as councils remaining dominant partners, the need for greater investment in community capacity and that local communities were not always directly involved with the CPPs (Scottish Government, no date).

Scottish Government (2010) published a Planning Advice Note on community engagement, which focuses on community engagement in planning. There are also National Standards for Community Engagement (Scottish Community Development Centre, no date), produced by the Scottish community development centre, which are offered as good practice principles with the intention of improving the process of community engagement.

In terms of co-production, Walton (2019) suggests that the 2006-onwards Local Development Plans in Scotland have reduced the ability for communities to engage in plans at the local authority scale. A further specific Scotland example was an investigation into the contribution of community empowerment policies to successful co-production. This research found that although policies can enhance co-production, success is dependent upon the institutional nexus between policy and practice. As co-production is reliant upon public organisations valuing participation and engagement and similar to the findings of the inquiry, it was found that a lack of flexibility, resistance to shifting power dynamics and friction between communities and councils as barrier (Steiner *et al.*, 2023).

Based on a case study in Scotland, the ABCD (asset-based model) has been identified as ‘neoliberalism with a community face’ (MacLeod and Emejulu, 2014). Community groups, known as ‘community participation bodies’ can make ‘Participation Requests’, as defined in Part 3 of the Scottish Act, where they can request to have greater involvement in decision-making and service delivery, this participation is labelled an ‘outcome improvement process.’ It is suggested that the Scottish approach to public service delivery (in terms of community

planning) is “underpinned by three key principles: an assets-based approach; coproduction of services; and an improvement philosophy” (Elliott, *et al.*, 2019: p.303).

Within the context of fiscal austerity and the increasing influence of the private sector's involvement in planning, findings based on a case study of West Dunbartonshire, Scotland show that higher quality design outcomes can be achieved through discretionary planning practices (Richardson and White, 2021).

In Scotland the wider scope of community planning, alongside the advent of Local Place Plans (LPPs), demonstrates that policy, guidance and oversight is in place for community planning, however there is more to learn from how Local Place Plans are formed and used, and to what extent they are binding as say SPGs. The Scottish Government (2021) published a literature review covering Local Place Plans, which concluded that LPPs would be useful in advancing governmental agendas and went as far as promoting LPP as tool not only to *‘build more trusting relationships between communities and local government’* but also to

*“provide intelligence from local communities to inform future public services” and “provide an opportunity for government to communicate its priorities, objectives and constraints, and collaborate with communities on their delivery locally”* (Scottish Government, 2021, p.6).

The LPPs were confirmed via a January 2022 circular which set out the necessary guidance on the LPP process to enable neighbourhoods (‘community bodies’) to commence their LPP.

### **Scotland context and community planning**

While literature exists on community planning in Scotland that is long run (cf. Illsley and McCarthy, 1998; Sinclair, 2008; Vercher *et al.*, 2021) historical attempts at community planning in Scotland have faced challenges, including council dominance and lack of community involvement. In 2012, Audit Scotland and other stakeholders and scrutiny partners developed an audit framework with the aim of improving performance and accountability of Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). One outcome was the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to improve local outcomes but has encountered barriers in practice. Since 2019 *community planning* activity in Scotland has featured Local Place Plans (LPPs), but little has yet been said about that recent policy tool. These are the closest policy tool to English neighbourhood plans and said by some to be “based largely upon” them (Walton, 2019, p. 2) and sit alongside Community Action Plans.

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), do have statutory weight in the planning process. LPAs must take them into account when preparing their Local Development Plans.

Some such Plans are adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. For example, Applecross formed a Community Land Use Plan in 2019 and applied for Supplementary Planning Guidance status. Prior to that policy iteration Scotland had attempted a form of community planning in the early years post-Devolution, with its first iteration being in 1998 with five ‘Pathfinder’ community planning projects (Edinburgh, Highland, Perth and Kinross, South Lanarkshire and Stirling). In 2001 the Community Planning Task Force was established and in 2003 community planning became statutorily binding, when the Scottish Parliament introduced the Local Government in Scotland Act, and specific statutory guidance on community planning was published in 2004.

### Benarty, Fife

The ex-mining communities comprising Benarty have a strong history of self-help, which some of our interviewees linked to the legacy of the coalmining industry in the area (see overall reflection below).

**Figure 5: Benarty Local Place Plan (2024)**



The LPP **process** was important, and successful, in bringing together the community, but it is also necessary to acknowledge the vibrant sense of community which existed already, exemplified through local events such as the annual music festival. It was suggested, however, that whilst people may be more than happy to attend such events, playing an active role in the production or implementation of the LPP was the preserve of a much smaller group. Nevertheless, the LPP is the latest in a succession of CLPs in Benarty – two Community Action Plans and a Climate Action Town report preceding it.

Certainly, that legacy is important in relation to the support provided by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT), which in turn was essential to the success of the Local Place Plan (LPP) in Benarty.

This indicates both the level of community activity in the area, and the need for ongoing action to remedy the issues faced, which currently include:

- Crime and antisocial behaviour
- Pressures on the local housing stock
- A feeling of being overwhelmed by (renewable) energy schemes
- A desire to preserve and protect the (mining) heritage of the area
- The sense that the community have limited control over what happens in and around the villages of Benarty

LPP is seen as being an essential step in addressing these issues, but, importantly, **only** a step – the key actors involved in its production recognise that in many ways “the hard work starts now”. The LPP is being used in discussions with Fife Council to give the community a stronger voice in decision making around planning and development; and is likely to be an important tool in bidding for funding.

### **Barmulloch, Balornock & Robroyston (BBR), Glasgow**

As with Benarty, the now registered Barmulloch, Balornock & Robroyston Local Place Plan (BBRLPP) is seen as being only a step on the journey towards addressing the issues faced by these communities in eastern Glasgow. The BBRLPP was one of ten LPPs within the city provided with funding to produce their plan, most of which, as is the case with BBRLPP, featured a community development company or similar organisation. The Barmulloch Community Development Company (BCDC) applied for that funding and commissioned the consultant who supported the community in preparing the plan, but that plan has now been taken up by the two Community Councils in the area, who will make use of it in much the same way as the Benarty LPP.

**Figure 6: Barmulloch, Balornock & Robroyston Plan advert**



The BBRLPP is an interesting example of a single-issue Community Led Plan, which in this instance focuses upon green space, in particular Robroyston Park, a large and neglected public open space. This focus, whilst questioned by some who were concerned about issues including the high levels of deprivation in the area, allowed for very strong engagement with young people and an arguably less political (with a small p) approach to consultation and plan production. The engagement and consultation activity generated a number of strong ideas for what the community wanted to see from Robroyston Park and the other green spaces in their area.

Many of these do relate to justice and the related aspects of the JEDI framework, including a desire to make these parks more accessible to everyone, and reduce the impacts of crime and antisocial behaviour on vulnerable members of the community. There are various community groups representing sectoral or spatial segments of the BBR communities, including “Friends of” park groups, the development companies noted above and the Community Councils. The focus on green space of the BBRLPP allowed these groups to engage in a non-partisan way with the plan production, but time will tell whether this can continue in the longer term.

## Annex VI: Wales context and cases

Community-led planning and neighbourhood governance in Wales has a notable history of community-based action and of governmental intervention. Such policy initiatives include the Communities First (C1) programme which ran from 2001 (Higgs and White, 2001; Pearce, 2008), which targeted the 100 most deprived areas of Wales, then extended to 150. That policy was reoriented by 2012 and formally ended in 2018 with numerous outputs assessing its impact (Dicks, 2014). In discussing the contradictions of public participation in regeneration projects in Wales, Dicks (2014) suggests that the Welsh government has used participation as an attempt to manage crisis, and pursued a form of ‘responsibilisation’ of the local communities rather than a more genuine activation. In reporting on the Communities First regeneration programme, Adamson and Bromley (2008, p.21) state that “impact on key markers of deprivation such as poor health, low educational achievement and poor housing quality has not been achieved”.

There has been a Planning Aid service operating in Wales since the 1980s to support people with regards to the formal planning system (Parker and Street, 2018). More recently the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 legislated for increasing participation and public engagement in planning and introduced Place Plans. They are non-statutory documents that can be adopted by Local Authorities as Supplementary Planning Guidance. A Place Plan can cover a range of issues that matter to a community, including non-planning matters, with a distinct section that forms the SPG element that links to the Local Development Plan. It can be a document that “sets out local level planning guidance on the use and development of land, links to planning policies set out by your Local Planning Authority, is written by local people who know the area well and can add more detail to the work done by the planners [and] can link to other local / Community Plans on a wide range of issues” (Planning Aid Wales, 2024, no pagination).

In assessing the prospects for successful Place Plans in Wales, Jones and Spence (2017) identified a need for mediation and facilitation, as well as questioning the capacity and aspirations of communities to engage with the policy. They point to wider problems of local government burdens and under-resourcing being likely to reduce the ability of Local Authorities to help deliver Place Plans. They advocate for online community-led planning tools such as ‘Shape My Town’ to aid in this.

Pill (2012) in presenting research on neighbourhood initiatives concluded that:

*“... the paradox is that despite increasing emphasis on localism, community empowerment and civil renewal, initiatives at the neighbourhood scale are not a viable approach in an era of economic austerity and deficit reduction.”*

While Scott *et al.* (2009), in exploring eight case studies across Wales, identified that

*“... communities seem united in their view of a systemic failure by policy and decision makers to address the core components of rural development required from both respondents and policy rhetoric”.*

They criticised the fragmented, centrally imposed and inflexible policy responses which lead to selective and elitist “overdevelopment” without recognition of the specific needs of place, community and environment. These mismatches resulted in ‘social, environmental and economic problems and growing community fragmentation, alienation and distrust’.

Jones *et al.* (2019) also set the context by investigating Place Planning in Wales via the lens of the seven well-being goals and five ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 legislation. Place Plans are seen as a key means of community-led planning in Wales. They were first introduced in 2013 in the Welsh Government’s consultation paper ‘Positive Planning: Proposals to reform the planning system in Wales and a formal part of the Welsh planning system since the publication of the *Development Plan Prospectus* (2015), the *Planning Prospectus Overview* (2015) and *Planning Policy Wales* (2016). 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 (see also JN working paper #3).

A Survey of Parish, Town and Community Councils in England and Wales conducted in 2021 (Giovannini *et al.*, 2023) shows that less than a third of councils had created a neighbourhood or place plan (see also SLCC, 2022). Notable instances of community planning activity in Wales, are the specific guidance for Place Planning in the Brecon Beacons National Park and, in terms of completed Place Plans, Planning Aid Wales discuss the cases of Mold, Brecon Beacons and Crickhowell (alongside similar types of Community / Place Plans which have been developed in England, highlighting Bath and cases in Shopshire).

Past experiences with community empowerment in Wales highlight the need for genuine activation rather than mere participation. The *Communities First* programme aimed to empower local communities but faced criticism for ineffective outcomes. The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 introduced Place Plans, which can cover various community issues but require mediation and facilitation – and are now being replaced by Placemaking Plans. Past experience with forms of community empowerment in Wales, shows that tools which at least touch upon influencing the lived environment, have met with criticism. With the more recent adoption of Place Plans, there has been incomplete take-up, while the tool has as yet to be assessed fully.

### Colwyn Bay case study summary

Located in Conwy County on the Coast of North Wales, Colwyn Bay is a mid-sized town of around 29,000 people. The town retains a strong character and architecture of significant local interest, as well as excellent natural resources, notably the beach and nearby woodland. These features made Colwyn an attractive tourist destination during the Victorian period. Until the late 1950s, the town was prosperous with thriving tourism and retail sectors, but the decline of the traditional seaside holiday and the construction of the A55 (Figure 7b) have been perceived as undermining the viability of traditional businesses and the vitality of the town (Interview CB2). The town has benefitted from significant investment in major regeneration projects in the past, including the relocation of County Council offices to the town centre, a major programme of coastal defence designed to enhance the beach and promenade, the creation of a centre of sporting excellence at Parc Eirias, the purchase and demolition of the Market Hall building, and the refurbishment of the Theatr Colwyn.

**Figure 7a, b: Colwyn Place Plan (2024) and the A55 Road as barrier**



The community produced a Place Plan, covering Rhos-on-Sea, Colwyn Bay, Old Colwyn and Bryn-y-Maen, sponsored by the Bay of Colwyn Town Council. This was achieved with significant assistance from Planning Aid Wales (using some innovative methods of community engagement) and supported by the planning team at Conwy County Borough Council. According to several community members, a significant driver for the plan was a perceived lack of community engagement during previous initiatives such as the Strategic Regeneration Area programme between 2008 and 2015 (Interview CB1). Following substantial community engagement exercises lead by PAW, the subsequent Place Plan was officially adopted by the Town Council in January 2024. Work is ongoing to have this adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Significantly, the town now has a Place Plan Manager in post to oversee various projects that have resulted from the plan, and several community-led working groups have been started.

Like Rhyl (below), Colwyn Bay features strong institutional support (County Council and PAW) and the Town Council was central to securing key financial support which catalysed the Place Plan. The plan activity is firmly rooted in the community, and is firmly integrated into local governance networks, with the result that community development activity can be considered substantial even as it is significantly professionalised (Interview CB3). The Place Plan therefore represents a formal initiative that is well integrated with a pro-active Town Council that has a good working relationship with the Conwy County Borough Council Strategic Planning Team.

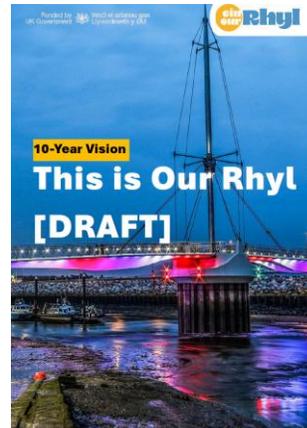
What comes through the Place Plan is a practical understanding of justice rooted in fairness, inclusion, and the safeguarding of valued assets. Residents describe it through positioning equitable *access* to housing, green spaces, and cultural facilities, as well as having a meaningful *voice* in shaping their area (i.e. to assert process legitimacy). Calls for genuinely affordable housing, restrictions on second homes and Airbnbs along the promenade, and the reuse of empty buildings for local needs show a concern for fairness between long-term residents and external groups. The plan is already shaping development: for example, a social housing provider, Cartrefi Conwy, has acquired an underutilised site for affordable housing addressing housing needs identified in the plan. Other priorities in the plan, such as protecting the promenade, pier, and Theatr Colwyn, and celebrating Welsh language and culture, reflect a view of justice as recognition and preservation of shared identity.

Probably the most significant environmental issue in Colwyn Bay of recent years has centred around the town's Waterfront Project, delivered over several phases, beginning in 2010. This may be regarded as a justice issue because it illustrates how investment in climate adaptation can unevenly benefit interest groups: the beach recharge not only provided flood protection but also catalysed economic regeneration along the promenade. Due to a physical separation – in the form of the A55 road and the railway line – pockets of deprivation in the town centre see less benefit from this investment. Meanwhile, areas like Kindle Bay that have suffered greater flood impacts receive less development support, reflecting a broader pattern of uneven vulnerability and unequal access to the benefits of environmental infrastructure in the area. This highlights how spatial decisions in climate resilience can reinforce existing inequalities and underscores the need to ensure that sustainability across the pillars of social, environmental and economic are considered together.

### **Rhyl case study summary**

Located in Denbighshire County on the Coast of North Wales, Rhyl is a mid-sized town of around 27,000 people. There is a deep pride within the community for its heritage and the natural beauty of its surroundings, but there is a widespread recognition of significant decline – the town “isn't what it was before” (Interview Rh4) – and now being known for its deprivation. The context of planning and regeneration in the town and wider area is heavily influenced by significant funding received in recent years. This has come from Westminster (e.g., UK Shared Prosperity Fund, UK Levelling Up Fund), Welsh Government (e.g. £25m Transforming Towns award in 2022 for projects in Rhyl) and Denbighshire County Council. The most recent funding programme is the UK Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods programme, with the Rhyl Neighbourhood Board formally established in early 2025 to develop a 10-year, £20 million regeneration strategy for the town.

**Figure 8a, b: Rhyl Town and Area Plan 2014-2020 / Rhyl Vision draft 2025**



Members of the community are clear that even large schemes are insufficient on their own to combat macro-economic trends and legacies of decline. Two common themes emerge in discussions with the community about the future of Rhyl, one is a sense of ‘left behindness’ following decades of economic decline – often linked to the loss of attractions such as the pier and Sun Centre Water Park – and the other is community ‘resilience’, although this is less frequently defined than invoked.

A Placemaking Plan was completed for Rhyl in 2019 and updated in 2025 (to reflect the Placemaking Wales Charter). Like other case studies in this research, this plan cannot be truly considered community-led, although it is rooted in significant community engagement activity. Indeed, this case may have some aspects in common with the Northern Irish cases in terms of institutional control, although the scale of the Placemaking Plan and level of community engagement is much closer to the focus of the research. Produced by the Economic Development team at Denbighshire County Council, alongside an urban design firm PlanIt.IE, the original plan followed engagement with around 2,500 local people over a 12-month period. The plan update was made following two workshops with Council Officers in late 2024. The plan and its update are therefore professionally produced, it provides principles (for place-making), examples of physical redevelopment projects (rather than planning policies) and an implementation plan. The placemaking plan identifies four core issues facing Rhyl:

1. Physical separation between the town and beach (similar to Colwyn Bay)
2. Spatial concentration of deprivation (broadly more affluent in the East)
3. Decline in retail (especially following the departure of several large national retailers)
4. Loss of identity (as a quintessential British seaside town)

These issues reflect interviews and informal conversations held with community members: for example, the separation between town and beach comes up frequently and another oft-cited example is the Children’s Village, built in the 1990s and largely funded by the European Regional Development Fundis, it is commonly derided as unpopular and poorly designed.

The plan also identifies four assets and eight ‘opportunities’. These are high level (e.g., ‘create civic spaces to be proud of’) rather than specific (planning) policies and the plan does not make explicit connection between issues of deprivation and inequality and proposed actions. The plan avoids explicitly distributive language, but refers instead to spatial disadvantage, access, resilience and economic opportunity. A strong concern amongst local residents not reflected in this plan concerns anti-social behaviour, again mirroring issues found in Colwyn Bay.

One tension has emerged in the case study concerning the future vision for the town. The beach and promenade are recognised as great assets and successive plans aim for Rhyl to be a ‘destination of choice’ (taken from Rhyl’s Vision Statement 2026-2035). All participants recognised the importance of tourism to Rhyl – yet there is also a commonly-expressed view that the town should try to be *less* dependent on tourism and should not ‘compete’ with neighbouring areas such as Llandudno. Although there is recognition that the tourism will not reach the heights of the mid-Twentieth Century, there are ideas but little consensus on what kind of economic activity the town should attract. For example, the prospect of the green economy contributing to the area was discussed by several participants, although projects such as the Rhyl Flats offshore wind farm had not translated into employment opportunities in Rhyl itself.

Plan-making activity is therefore at the community level but is strongly co-ordinated by the County Council. Although the label is unhelpful, this could be called ‘top-down’, and is notable for its relationship to inward investment. This is not to say that this activity is not rooted in community *consultation*, although there is still some evidence that “residents need to feel more listened to”: one interviewee stated that Rhyl has had some “*great schemes [and] spent millions of pounds*”, but “*it’s never on something that has been a real community need. It’s been more about what the [local council] think the community need*” (Interview Rh3). This was explicitly linked to community desire for improved youth and leisure facilities and concerns over over-concentration of HMOs (more typically referred to locally as bedsits).

During 2025, the updated Placemaking Plan helped shaped the early work of Rhyl Neighbourhood Board, established to develop a long-term vision for funding from the UK Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods. The Neighbourhood Board goes under the title “Our Rhyl/Ein Rhyl”. It is working with Savills, Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council, Denbighshire Youth Service, and other local partners. Early engagement has included workshops, pop-ups, and social media campaigns. An online and in person survey in Summer 2025 drew 550 responses. This early engagement suggest that the major concerns were retail vacancies (addressed by the Placemaking Plan), alongside poverty and inequality, and community safety (both less prominent in the 2019 plan).

## Annex VII: Northern Ireland context and cases

A great deal of wider community development work has been pursued in recent decades in Northern Ireland, some stemming from attempts to bridge divides made worse by the troubles (see McAlister, 2010; Knox and Carmichael, 2015). The research will be looking carefully at how to navigate a challenging social cultural milieu in examining recent community planning efforts – particularly given the sensitivity and different meanings attributed to labels such as ‘community’ in Northern Ireland. This will focus largely on activity after the creation of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. This legislation stated that councils, Northern Ireland Departments, are to promote and encourage community planning through working with ‘community planning partners’ via Community Planning Partnerships. The Departments are required for the LDP to have regard for resultant Community Plans in the exercise of their departmental functions. In April 2015, the reform of Local Government resulted in the creation of 11 new councils. These new councils act as the lead for the community planning process for their district, whereby Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) have been formed. Section 73 in Part 10 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 lays out the requirement for wider participation in community planning.

Place plans were introduced in NI following local government reorganisation in 2014 although relatively few were completed by 2024 and indeed pre-existing work looking at community planning in NI had noted the reticence to cede control to communities. This view was beginning to alter as our work progressed with DfC arguing that they were moving towards a more joined-up and community-led approach, with some experimentation taking place through ‘place-shaping plans’. However, our cases indicated a mix of paternalistic behaviours and direct political lobbying was still the prevailing situation. In both cases these approaches had not been successful in inscribing or pursuing deeper or structural problems that were driving poor IMD statistics.

From the Northern Ireland perspective, the components of community planning were laid out prior to 2015, and that such activity should involve:

- An effective, statute-based Community Planning process led and facilitated by the new councils

- A clear statutory requirement on all other public bodies including policing, health and education bodies to participate in and support the Community Planning process
- A clear duty placed on councils to engage with local communities to produce a community plan (see Cave, 2013)

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO, 2022) compiled a report on planning in Northern Ireland, identifying that *“the planning system should positively and proactively facilitate development that contributes to a more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable Northern Ireland”*. However, there was no mention about how community planning can assist with delivering that goal. Rafferty (2020) suggests that *“advancements with community planning models elsewhere expose the limitations of its conceptualisation and operationalisation in Northern Ireland.”* Recommendations to be considered in policy debates, included defining a ‘community’ with rights, capability building, consideration of power and influence, monitoring and evaluation, and greater accountability and transparency.

### **Northern Irish Case Study summaries**

Community planning efforts in Northern Ireland are influenced by historical divides and require careful navigation of social contexts. There has been a long-term recognition of deprivation and injustice in NI, with justice being a key theme of much post-troubles policy and deprivation has been a high-profile issue across many parts of the area. This was primarily tackled by the creation of NRAs without associated funding after 2000, these areas still operate. The DfSD / DfC community engagement approach set out 12 years ago explicitly mentions the need to enable more ‘disadvantaged’ areas:

*“Communities are at their most vibrant when people have a strong degree of self-determination, becoming active citizens who shape and participate in their own community. This engagement is the foundation on which our policies and programmes should be built, yet **it is often in the most disadvantaged areas that people are least equipped to engage**”* (DfSD, 2013, p17, our emphasis).

The NI cases are based on Colin in West Belfast (within the boundary of Belfast City Council) and West Armagh - now in the Borough of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. At the local level informal policy approaches, such as ‘place-shaping’ plans, have been developed for some neighbourhoods (Community Places, 2025).

## West Armagh

The Armagh case highlights a wider set of issues that frame the experience of planning and neighbourhood policy in Northern Ireland. What the existing formal framework of policy and funding in NI appears to do, when considered through the experience of West Armagh, is to recognise but neglect the very local scale, and the results of the *People and Place* review are now being considered, with the DfC (Department for Communities) looking to alter the approach to place-making and neighbourhoods and in area of deprivation:

*"...what we do today is not where we want to be, where we've just completed a review and we will hopefully be implementing the findings of that review...So we're in a period where there'd be hopefully a degree of change which will be for the better. So that's essentially, you know what my role is to work in those areas of particular disadvantage and to try and ultimately improve the outcomes in those areas".*  
(Interview N2)

This indicates how, more than 20 years of NRA work and 10 years post Community Plans and Place Plans being launched, a recognition of the limited impact on deprivation across NI is being reflected upon and the community in West Armagh hold a fairly dismal view of the way that control has been kept by the formal institutions. The findings here tend to reinforce Rafferty's (2020) observations regarding the way in which partner organisations have tended to operate with communities.

**Figure 9: Armagh Place Plan (2022)**

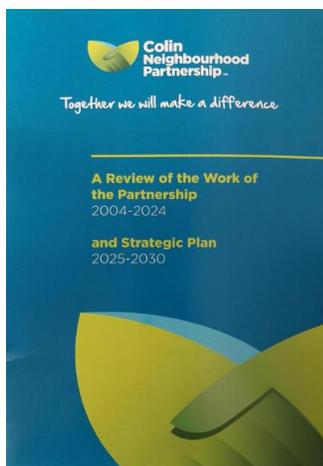


Overall, the policy landscape in which West Armagh sits is somewhat crowded but also fragmented. Deeper rooted issues are somehow elided in favour of more diffuse economic development aspirations and small project funding, while a lack of a completed development plan is a missed opportunity to shape the built environment progressively. Instead, the desire to portray Armagh positively sits uncomfortably with the circumstances that around one third of the population live in.

## Colin, Belfast

The key or main organising forum (i.e. CNP) act as a means to mobilise effective lobbying direct to politicians, and budget holders regarding community need and local issues. Lessons from Neighbourhood Forums in England appear to suggest some similarity – there is some merit in these intermediate institutions as a focus for community and for other actors (and given the lack of a ‘parish’ equivalent in NI). The existence of the NRA and more specifically the CNP as its organisational ‘face’ acts much in the way that English neighbourhood forums provided a point of contact and key node for communication (Parker *et al.*, 2020). However, such organisations rarely retain planning or place shaping expertise, with programmes of activity and community support dominating.

### Figure 10: Colin NRA strategy (2025)



The NRAs still reflect the formal scale and status for considering neighbourhoods who are identified as the locus for action in respect of IMD domains. However, all agencies and policy areas should be aware of and consider those issues in their approaches. This is not transparent or well communicated in existing formulations. Despite obstacles the case of Colin shows how the NRA and community actors have worked to improve the physical properties of greenspace and, in the past, worked-up support for a new town centre area via lobbying. The Colin strategy (2025) is quite expansive and while NRA strategies exist, they appear to vary in quality across NI. Even in Colin where the strategy is well formulated there could be a greater emphasis on process and on evidence and indeed, on integration across land use planning, economic development and community / Place Planning.

Place-making and extending the idea of ‘whole place’ consideration for areas ranked high in terms of deprivation, is one of the main points of reflection here. Thus far place planning for Belfast has not been undertaken but lessons from elsewhere appear to be filtering into both the DfC and to BCC.

Issue based versus space-based intervention characterises one of the dualisms found in policy that affect deprived communities. How to integrate this through well-conceived and mission

driven ‘place-based’ policy is clearly an aim which government (pan-UK) should have in their sights. There is an opportunity for greater boundary-spanning to begin ‘from below’. However, better or more targeted support and facilitation for this type of working would be beneficial; partly because community actors and NRA workers understandably feel unsure about what to do, how to do it and whether such work would reap any dividends. This then links to the basis upon which policy support is available and what the terms of engagement are – including how to mobilise expert knowledge and valid techniques and co-mingle action and ideas from experts and institutions with local and lay knowledge and understanding.

The key points that emerge from this case:

- Community planning activity which employs **traditional consultation** with its known limits, and which is led by institutional actors
- Place plans which do not focus on the neighbourhood **scale** and
- **Omission** of issues and actions particular to deprived areas

Lessons to be drawn here include questions of:

- Appropriate **scale** for ‘Place plans’ of **linkage** to other plans and strategies and to appropriate **support / facilitation**
- **Oversight and scrutiny** - how and on what basis to keep questions of deprivation and justice in view, and to keep actions which are geared to addressing such challenges in focus

Thus, it remains unclear how policy efforts actually pursue those issues - many drivers and solutions are linked and appear unlikely to achieve local justice. Given the City Council appear to place great store in housing as a means to address economic weaknesses in the City, and increase the population, the role of estate regeneration (cf. Watt, 2021; Taylor, 2018) appears pertinent in both case studies. At the moment BCC encourage relocation to the City centre area and indirectly help address deprivation. However there appears little emphasis on prioritising new social housing in NRA areas (Housing Association interviewee), which somewhat hints at a lack of joined-up policy and implementation in relation to NRA / social deprivation issues. Stubborn obstacles such as silo working are blamed in part, but new approaches are now being endorsed:

*“...rather than, you know each different part of government doing their bit in the silo, we’re all supposed to be working more closely together. So, I mean the classic example would be the idea is to improve, you know, the amount of social and all tenure housing” (Interview N1).*