

## Just Neighbourhoods?

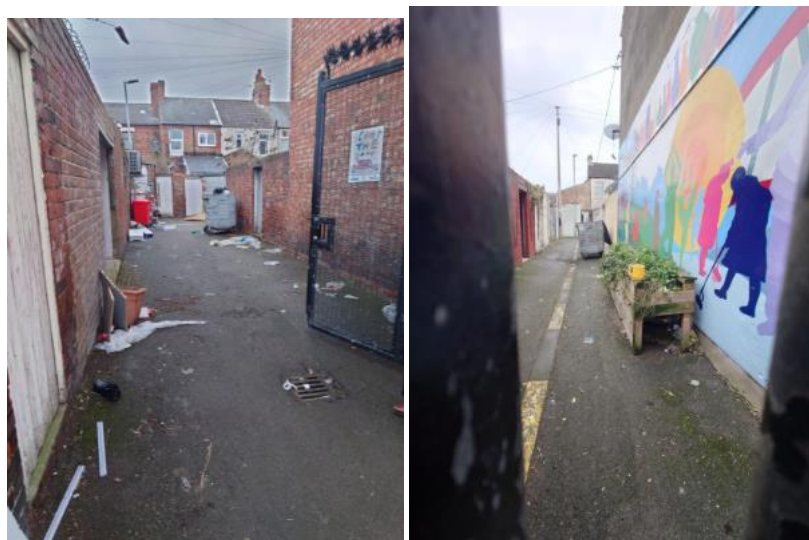
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### 'Community-led' planning stories

Part of a series of concise accounts relating the experience of neighbourhoods ranked highly against the index of deprivation, where residents have engaged with 'community-led' planning.

**Newport (Gresham), Middlesbrough – “having a neighbourhood plan for the area would make a difference if it was community informed...giving people a chance to voice about what is important to their area”**

This story is based on the research we have conducted about Newport, a neighbourhood in Middlesbrough that many local residents call Gresham. Newport has experienced significant change over the past two decades. Large areas of housing were demolished (around 600 homes) as part of regeneration plans, leaving empty land and uncertainty about the future of the neighbourhood. For many residents this experience left a lasting impact. People describe feeling that major decisions about their community have historically been made without them.



Today the area still faces considerable challenges. Newport is ranked among the most deprived neighbourhoods in England, according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (51st of 32,844 neighbourhoods). Health inequalities are significant, with high rates of illness and premature death compared with national averages.

But the story of Newport is not only about deprivation. It is also about people who care about their neighbourhood and want to see it improve. Community organisations and residents have worked together to develop plans and ideas for the area. A recent example is the creation of a Neighbourhood Priority Statement, which set out local aspirations around safety, housing quality and community cohesion. The intention was to create a shared vision for the future of the neighbourhood. However, some residents and even some decision-makers were not aware that the document existed, and it is considered to have had little influence on decisions affecting the area as yet. This highlights a challenge faced by many communities: plans may exist on paper, but people need to see them recognised and applied in practice.

At the same time, community-led initiatives continue to emerge across the neighbourhood. Cultural activities and community spaces are helping rebuild pride and connection. Residents emphasise that improving everyday life is not only about large-scale redevelopment. It is also about smaller actions that bring people together and strengthen the social fabric of the community. This is particularly important in Newport, where the transient nature of parts of the population can make it harder to build lasting relationships and shared identity. Local VCSE organisations have helped motivate co-production approaches, and there is qualified support for better planning *“having a neighbourhood plan for the area would make a difference if it was community informed. If it is part of co-production, giving people a chance to voice about what is important to their area. They will keep it and like it... It is about perception; we need to create the perception that people are being consulted and are part of the decisions at a lower level.”*

There are important lessons here for communities facing similar challenges:

- **Engaging people in meaningful ways is essential**, particularly in places where residents feel excluded from past decisions.
- **Working with residents and organisations already embedded in the community** is vital for sustaining meaningful engagement.
- **Planning and community development teams need to work more closely together** to recognise and utilise community knowledge and lived experience in decision-making.
- **Building relationships across diverse communities** and reconciling differences is a necessary foundation for long-term change.
- **Community projects** that build pride and connection can have a powerful impact on quality of life.
- **Community plans need to be visible and actively used** if they are to build trust and make a positive difference.

The experience of Newport shows that communities living in difficult circumstances still care deeply about their neighbourhoods and their future. Residents continue to organise, support one another and imagine ways to improve the place they call home. They have been willing to formalise their priorities through engaging with the system. The challenge is not a lack of ideas or commitment within the community. Rather, it lies more in whether the decision makers and institutions around them are able to recognise, support and act on those ideas.