3ni

national network
for neighbourhood
improvement

3ni's response to ICON's Green Paper Consultation

Delivering Neighbourhood Renewal: Proposals for Change

October 2025

3ni

Chapter 1

A new national neighbourhood intervention

Outcomes and progress measurement

- Do you think a programme should take an "outcomes-based" approach or an "outcomes-focused" approach?
- How do we ensure that evidence and data is collected on key outcomes without overly restricting the work at a community-level?
- How should we balance the need for data with the views of residents with the desire for data accuracy and the need to measure and identify?

Both outcomes-focused and outcomes-based strategies play an important role in neighbourhood regeneration, although outcomes-based approaches allow the flexibility for innovation and bespoke initiatives and interventions to meet locally identified needs and priorities.

As the Green Paper acknowledges, the reality in the most doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods is that need intersects and overlaps across outcome areas. Residents in these communities experience fewer employment opportunities, lower educational attainment, poorer quality housing conditions and worse physical and digital connectivity. Previous top-down outcomes-focused regeneration strategies aimed at achieving specific outcomes, such as Housing Market Renewal, have often failed to deliver, and as 3ni has heard, in some instances left residual mistrust and trauma in the communities that experienced them.

Communities facing double deprivation are in need of genuine transformation that is rooted in meeting local neighbourhood needs, and facilitated by a genuine devolution of power and responsibility over investment decisions directly to communities themselves. This should be done in a way that, through a commitment to building community capacity, seeks to centre local residents' expertise and lived experience, and draw on the local assets inherent in the community.

An outcomes-based approach harnesses the evidence on what works without compromising on the latitude that is required to target interventions to meet the specific needs and priorities of individual neighbourhoods. At the national level, 3ni supports an outcomes-based strategy as a more flexible means of enabling a genuine devolution of power from Whitehall to the communities which are most in need of community-led regeneration.

Nonetheless, outcomes-focused strategies play an important role in driving impact at the neighbourhood level, particularly where the focus is on investing to build social capital and social infrastructure.

3ni has heard from its members how a preoccupation with quantitative measures of progress and success can stifle innovation. While data is critical to targeting investment and measuring impact (for example, using the Index of Multiple Deprivation in conjunction with the Community Needs Index to identify and target funding and resources at 'doubly disadvantaged' neighbourhoods), policymakers should be data-influenced, as opposed to strictly data-driven. This means using data as a tool to support strategy and delivery, complemented by qualitative research and participatory methodologies. It also involves ongoing and sustained deep community engagement to understand residents' experiences of their neighbourhoods and interventions, and to provide qualitative ground truthing.

Resident and community leadership

- How can we ensure any renewal programme is community/resident-led?

Ensuring that a renewal programme is community and/or resident-led is vital to its success and sustainability. It is predicated on the belief that communities are the experts on their local area. Programme guidelines should stipulate that residents and representatives of the beneficiary community are members of the local governance arrangements, able to access specific funding for community engagement and capacity building. It requires an acceptance of 'letting go' on the behalf of the public sector, an ability to cede power and control to the community, and the management of any tensions between representative and participatory democracy.

Interventions in deprived communities are too often carried out without significant input from local people, instead using (or 'parachuting in') staff and organisations from outside the area. They neglect to build community confidence or capacity locally, often resulting in communities being and feeling 'done to'. It also means that initiatives do not target the most pressing issues, as experienced by local residents, and cannot benefit from and harness the wealth of expertise, relationships, passions and knowledge that exist in communities. As 3ni has heard, professionalised activities can crowd out or displace existing community initiatives. Too often, when the short-term or 'funny money' is exhausted and the programme period ends, the funded activities cease, external staff leave the area, and communities are left no better off than before the intervention.

3ni is developing practices to change this. Our work is informed by learning from the Big Local programme, England's largest example of resident-led neighbourhood change, as well as other successful regeneration initiatives such as the New Deal for Communities. It also draws on the recent experience of pioneering local authorities across the country that are developing and implementing neighbourhood-based working in a way that supports, develops and centres community and resident leadership.

We want to see residents of beneficiary programmes equipped with the confidence and capacity to lead neighbourhood-focused regeneration initiatives, making decisions on the allocation of resources to tackle the priorities they have identified, and working in partnership with public services from a position of parity and power. We can ensure that any future renewal programme is community and resident-led by stipulating the need for resident involvement in local governance arrangements, e.g. through majority membership on each area or neighbourhood management board or partnership. This could follow the Big Local model of at least 50% of the partnership comprised of local residents.

Enabling resident leadership in practice requires policymakers and programme designers, such as those in local authorities or the wider public sector, to place themselves in the position of a resident of a doubly disadvantaged neighbourhood and experience the community from that perspective. It also means empathising with and understanding what it is like to live there, recognising the community's aspirations for its future, and identifying the support and resources needed to build local capacity.

Fostering resident leadership means embarking on a process of sustained, genuine and meaningful community engagement, development and capacity building work, facilitating and supporting the community to identify what it wants to do, and how it wants to do it. It follows that the starting point for resident-led neighbourhood regeneration involves creating trusting relationships with local communities and developing residents' own sense of agency and control.

This is beneficial in itself. Fostering resident feelings of agency and control has been found to positively impact health and wellbeing outcomes. Multiple recent studies have found that feelings of control are a key determinant of mental health, where a lack of control can manifest in chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and anger.[1]

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1. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods (2022). *Overcoming health inequalities in 'left behind' neighbourhoods.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/overcoming-health-inequalities-in-left-behind-neighbourhoods/

Population-level research from Glasgow noted positive associations between mental health and empowerment among 4,000 households experiencing local regeneration.[2] Higher levels of social activities and stronger community networks improve mental health and equip communities with the tools to come together to advocate for themselves and others.

Therefore, fostering resident leadership as an outcome in and of itself is wholly worthwhile, directly impacting on life outcomes. The ripple effects are felt much wider, as the benefits of resident-led investment cascade out into the community.

Geographies

- Is the LSOA level the right starting point for the scale of any new neighbourhood intervention?

The LSOA level is the most appropriate spatial starting point for creating a plan for any new neighbourhood intervention, with the caveat that the end focus point and objective is meaningful, natural neighbourhoods that local people relate to, with an appropriate population footprint that best supports outcomes and impact.

It is critical that any approach to defining and analysing neighbourhoods for the purposes of policy and development of a new intervention will lead to target geographical communities that resonate with the understanding and experiences of residents living within them. Whilst LSOAs are an appropriate jumping-off point for a strategic, hyper-local neighbourhoods approach, allowing data to be aggregated through clusters of adjacent LSOAs and parts of LSOAs, they remain a statistical geographic construct. As such, they may not in themselves produce meaningful neighbourhoods that people identify with or that foster a sense of belonging, given the inherently subjective nature of place.

3ni's recent work with local authorities has sought to address the risk that LSOAs might cut across natural neighbourhoods and fail to align with real communities through a two-fold approach to neighbourhood-based policy development: beginning with an LSOA-based analysis of community need harnessing CNI data and the *Discovery* diagnostic tool.[3] Secondly, this involves undertaking extensive qualitative research and 'deep listening' with residents and community-based organisations to test and refine these data insights, and to help define 'natural neighbourhoods' for use in policy design and the implementation of any initiative.

3ni is therefore wholly supportive of the need to engage with residents on an understanding of geographical boundaries, and the identification and definition of neighbourhoods proposed using standard administrative units, and sees a two-step approach as the key to leveraging existing data and enhancing it through resident expertise and lived experience.

However, an overly geographic focus can undermine the connections and wider community dynamics extending beyond 'natural neighbourhood' boundaries. Therefore, the qualitative strand should also contain an emphasis on defining the connections between and across neighbourhoods. The bridging social and physical infrastructure, which connects 'natural neighbourhoods' and levels of social capital that it supports, is critical to a wider areas' economic prosperity as well as residents' sense of connection, cohesion and belonging to their place.[4]

2. Popay, Jennie (2023). *Investigating health and social outcomes of the Big Local community empowerment initiative in England: a mixed method evaluation.* Available at: https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/phr/GRMA6711#s2
3. OCSI (2025), LSOAs, LEPs and lookups : *A beginner's guide to statistical geographies.* Available at: https://ocsi.uk/2019/03/18/lsoas-leps-and-lookups-a-beginners-guide-to-statistical-geographies/
4. Halpern, David; Haldane, Andy (2025). *Social Capital 2025: The hidden wealth of nations.* Available at: https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/

Outcome measurement

- Do you agree that the intervention should be focused on social infrastructure and building social capital within neighbourhoods?
- How can this be linked into broader efforts to improve housing, infrastructure and economic outcomes within places?

At a time of significant budget pressures, it is important to target investment at those neighbourhoods where the social fabric is most damaged, where community engagement and associational life are most eroded, and where local civic institutions that underpin health, wellbeing and economic outcomes are lacking. These institutions form the building blocks of social infrastructure that support the development, accumulation and maintenance of social capital.

The impact of low levels of social infrastructure combined with high levels of socio-economic deprivation on outcomes for residents of 'left behind' or doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods is well-documented, such as the foundational research by Local Trust [5] and the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods between 2020 and 2024. More recently, 3ni's Social Capital 2025 series of reports in partnership with Demos and Local Trust found that social capital levels are critical to a range of outcomes at the neighbourhood level, from a positive influence on outcomes for children and young people [6] to the prevention of crime in neighbourhoods. [7] Investing in social capital and infrastructure also underpins community health outcomes, from promoting healthy lifestyle factors to building community resilience. [8]

What does social infrastructure investment look like in practice? A report by the APPG examined local authorities' investment to build social infrastructure and capital using 'Communities and Place' UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding. Examples of effective strategies included investing in community development workers to reach into neighbourhoods with traditionally lower levels of engagement and running 'Big Ideas' schemes that enable residents to identify spending priorities. They also involved investing in the formation of a new network of community leaders and organisations working to drive local change, as well as strengthening community involvement in neighbourhood planning processes. [9]

Recent examples from local authorities taking a strategic approach to investing in social infrastructure and social capital include Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Strengthening Communities programme, supported by 3ni, which focuses on building social capital at the hyper-local level. It is also a key feature of the 'Removing barriers to opportunity' mission in the City's Future 100 Prospectus. The council recognises that "the city's most deprived neighbourhoods are also affected by a lack of social capital in the form of amenities and organisations, leading to social isolation and reduced access to vital services and support." It also acknowledges the need to "address inequalities and promote social mobility by working intensively with the voluntary and community sector to invest and build resilience in deprived neighbourhoods with weak social capital." [10]

As the Prospectus notes, "Doubly-deprived neighbourhoods are cut off from the economy and wider society by an absence of amenities, organisations and meaningful connections. Rebuilding the social and economic fabric of these places will bring purpose and opportunity to the lives of thousands of people and ensure that all of our city can contribute to, and benefit from, economic growth," and aims to do this by linking into broader efforts to improve outcomes and taking a strategic, mission-led approach. Without a geographically

5. Local Trust (2019). *Left behind? Understanding communities on the edge.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/local_trust_ocsi_left_behind_research_august_2019.pdf

6. Coutts, Adam; Mauricio Dias Velasuez, Diego (2025). *Social Capital 2025: A protective shield for children, families and communities.* Available at: https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-a-protective-shield-for-children-families-and-communities/

7. Lesiak, Meg; Coutts, Adam (2025). *Social Capital 2025: The case for strengthening social bonds to prevent crime.* Available at: https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Social-Capital-2025_Crime_Paper_Feb.ac_.pdf

8. Wang, Senhu; Xia, Shuting; Coutts, Adam (2025). *Social capital 2025: Reinforcing the bedrock of the nation's health.* Available at: https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Social-Capital-2025_Health-Paper_Feb-2025-1.pdf

9. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, *Sharing Prosperity: Community renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.* Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Policy-Short-2-Sharing-Prosperity.pdf

10. Stoke-on-Trent City Council (2025). *Future 100 Prospectus.* Available at: https://www.stoke.gov.uk/cityprospectus#:~:text=The%20prospectus%20document%20–%20called%20Future,opportunity%20for%20decades%20to%20come

targeted approach towards the most doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, evidence from previous neighbourhood regeneration interventions shows that economic benefits tend to 'leak out' of the areas they are intended to support, and those furthest from the labour market do not access opportunities aimed at improving their incomes and quality of life.

Neighbourhood policy and investment in social infrastructure should be linked to broader efforts to improve housing, infrastructure and economic outcomes within places through a sustained focus on moving towards a localised model of prevention. In practice, this means shifting away from a transactional approach to public service delivery to one that is built around partnerships, relationships and community. Good examples of this include the cultural change within a local authority pioneered by Wigan Council, and the support for local community social infrastructure, as documented in 3ni's report of its study visit to Wigan,[11] as well as the 'Liberated Method' of prevention and intervention pioneered by Changing Futures Northumbria. The Green Paper cites how one service user, Brian, had received a minimum of £2 million worth of public services in recent years, whilst under the 'Liberated Method', this yearly expenditure fell to £70k per annum, with costs declining in rate.[12]

One of the biggest factors behind sustainable local economic development is the capacity of citizens to develop their individual human and social capital – and then to come together to foster collective economic activity and assets in their communities. The Big Local programme is a demonstrable example of this, with numerous case studies such as Ambition Lawrence Weston, which featured in the government's Dormant Assets Strategy in a local approach to kickstarting economic growth rooted in social infrastructure development.[13] The connection between social infrastructure and economic development is also reflected in quantitative research. Research by Frontier Economics, on behalf of Local Trust, shows that social infrastructure investment generates economic and fiscal returns.[14] Every £1.00 invested in the social infrastructure of the most disadvantaged areas delivers a return on investment of £3.20.

Ultimately, committing to community development as a vehicle to drive broader improvements in housing and local economies, with the ability to step back and support greater local levels of local community ownership and control, is key. This strategic drive should be shared between partners to build healthy and resilient communities through investment in quality places that people want to live and work in.[15]

11. 3ni and Local Trust, *3ni Wigan Study Visit Report* (2025). Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/3ni-Wigan-Study-Visit-71.pdf
12. Smith, Mark; Hesselgreaves, Hannah; Charlton, Ron; Wilson, Rob (2025). *New development: The 'liberated method'*—a transcendent public service innovation in polycrisis, Public Money and Management.
13. DCMS (2025). *Dormant Assets Strategy.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dormant-assets-scheme-strategy/dormant-assets-scheme-strategy#ministerial-foreword
14. Frontier Economics (2021). *The impacts of social infrastructure investment: a report for Local Trust.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Frontier-Economics_the-impacts-of-social-infrastructure-investment.pdf
15. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, *Sharing Prosperity: Community renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.* Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Policy-Short-2-Sharing-Prosperity.pdf

Targeting investment to the neighbourhoods most in need

- Do you agree that neighbourhood interventions should focus on England's mission-critical neighbourhoods?
- How should we prioritise areas within the 613 mission-critical neighbourhoods?
- How should we ensure an appropriate distribution around the country, given a small number of towns have a very large number of mission-critical neighbourhoods (e.g. Blackpool)?
- Do you agree that ICON's Hyper Local Need Measure should be used to identify areas for inclusion in a new neighbourhood intervention?
- What limitations might exist in using ICON's Hyper Local Need Measure?

Research by 3ni, Local Trust and other partners has shown that the neighbourhoods most in need are those which experience the double disadvantage of high levels of economic deprivation and low levels of social infrastructure.[16] With residents experiencing worse outcomes compared to similarly deprived (but better resourced and connected) areas, there is a strong, objective case for neighbourhood interventions to focus on doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The Community Needs Index (CNI) was developed in response to the evidence which showed that a lack of places to meet, the absence of an engaged and active community, and poor connectivity to the wider economy – both physical and digital – make a significant difference to social and economic outcomes for deprived communities.[17]

As the Green Paper acknowledges, research shows that these doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, characterised as ranking in the top 10% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the top 10% of the CNI, tend to be behind on nearly all of the government's mission domains. These neighbourhoods experience poorer outcomes across a range of key indicators compared not only to the national average, but also to other, similarly deprived areas. In the final report of its landmark inquiry into levelling up, the APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods identified nine dimensions of disadvantage experienced by the residents of these areas, often overlapping with or reinforcing each other, leading to worse overall outcomes for residents.[18] They are: higher rates of poverty; less vibrant local economies; fewer opportunities to secure skilled employment; lower educational attainment; worse population health; higher rates of disability; limited connectivity; weaker social fabric and less funding and investment.

Preventative investment to tackle these dimensions of disadvantage will require a concerted long-term focus at the national level to build stronger social foundations, neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood. Targeting investment at the hyperlocal level in those communities with the highest levels of community need and worst inequalities in outcomes will be the bedrock of a preventative, strengths-based approach.

The importance of social infrastructure investment in underpinning sustainable approaches to neighbourhood regeneration led 3ni to develop the Discovery diagnostic tool, enabling policymakers to better understand the types and drivers of community need at the hyper-local LSOA level and to target investment and outreach towards the neighbourhoods most in need. It is designed to help rebuild social infrastructure and social capital, prevent issues from arising or worsening, foster community resilience, and support improved wellbeing and economic outcomes in areas experiencing the greatest inequalities. Discovery could help policymakers in local and national government to target investment towards such priority areas, if building social infrastructure and supporting social capital growth is a priority.[19]

16. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods (2023). *A neighbourhood strategy for national renewal: Final report of the APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods' inquiry into levelling up.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/A-Neighbourhood-Strategy-for-National-Renewal.pdf
17. OCSI and Local Trust (2019). *Left behind? Understanding communities on the edge.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/research/left-behind-understanding-communities-on-the-edge/
18. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, (2023). *A neighbourhood strategy for national renewal: Final report of the APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods' inquiry into levelling up.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/A-Neighbourhood-Strategy-for-National-Renewal.pdf
19. 3ni (2025). *About Discovery*, See: https://3ni.co.uk/consultancy/

By using the CNI in combination with other measures such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the new Social Capital Score, Discovery would help to direct investment toward doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and include many of the MCNs identified by the HLNI. The government's latest neighbourhood policy developments demonstrate alignment with an approach prioritising 'doubly disadvantaged' neighbourhoods, with 19 of the 20 'trailblazer' neighbourhoods in England announced in the 2025 Spending Review identified as doubly disadvantaged by 3ni using Discovery.

Distributing and allocating investment

- Do you agree this approach should be taken to the delivery of a new neighbourhood interventions?
- Are there any limitations or risks arising from this approach?
- Do you agree with our analysis that competitive bidding should not be used to determine inclusion of areas in a new neighbourhood intervention?

The danger of competitive bidding processes for something as fundamental as area regeneration and improvement is that they can lead to inequitable distribution of resources by privileging areas with the in-built capacity, networks, resources and experience to write persuasive bids.

For example, there was widespread criticism amongst local authorities of competitive bidding processes for large-scale regeneration opportunities following the Levelling Up Fund allocations under the previous administration.[20] Research has found that residents of doubly disadvantaged or 'left behind' neighbourhoods are less able to benefit from the active and engaged local communities and the presence of local community groups and networks that enable partnership working with local government and other organisations on strategic issues like bid-writing. Generally, the residents of doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more at risk of alienation from public service provision, partnership working and decision making,[21] with a real risk that the areas that need it most might be missed.

Competitive processes also demand significant time, energy and resources for local authorities just to complete the application process, let alone get projects off the ground. This shifts the emphasis away from the deep community listening and investment in resident leadership which are so critical to impact and instead put pressure on energy to be directed towards the bureaucratic process: filling out forms and applications. Areas can be unsuccessful at great expense when resources are already stretched thin. Research by the APPG into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund under the 'Levelling Up' agenda found that some local authorities expressed concerns over government demands to produce multiple detailed and partially duplicative planning documents to access levelling up funds in quick succession.[22]

Bidding can also entrench a focus on time-limited or 'oven/shovel-ready' projects that are 'off the shelf', but which might not be integrated with other workstreams, limiting the impact on broader life outcomes beyond funding cycles and stifling innovation and projects which genuinely seek to effect transformation through systems change and the devolution of power to residents.

3ni supports the allocation of investment according to the careful prioritisation of need. The Discovery diagnostic tool, developed in partnership with OCSI, was designed to assist policymakers in developing neighbourhood needs profiles and allocating spend accordingly.

20. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, *Sharing Prosperity: Community renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.* Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Policy-Short-2-Sharing-Prosperity.pdf

21. Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) (2021b). *'Left behind' neighbourhoods: Community data dive.* Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/APPG-Community-Data-Dive-Report-for-APPG-S7.pdf

22. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, *Sharing Prosperity: Community renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.* Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Policy-Short-2-Sharing-Prosperity.pdf

Framework for targeting and designing a new neighbourhood intervention

- How should regional and local policy makers, and local private and third sector organisations, be consulted on any new neighbourhood intervention in their locality?

Consultation in the form of meaningful engagement with local and regional policy-makers is an opportunity to join up strategy and services, and bring together organisations and decision-makers to critically reflect on shared opportunities for growth, investment, collaboration and improvement.

3ni, in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, engaged in extensive consultation to inform a resident-led regeneration programme with private and third sector organisations working across target neighbourhoods. Meetings were proactively set up with key partners across the NHS and VCSE sector. This culminated in a monthly steering group, who came together to design and oversee the creation of the 'Strengthening Communities' programme, with 3ni serving as an expert member. Other strategic partners on the steering group included the local VCSE infrastructure organisation, Integrated Care Board and local community-led organisations such as the Portland Inn Project and Middleport Matters.

Research by the APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods found that processes of consultation for large-scale regeneration projects can privilege the larger and more established organisations, which have traditionally held a seat at the table.[23] There is a need to ensure that policymakers in the process of consultation proactively engage with community-led organisations operating on the ground and take steps to connect these groups with more established service deliverers. As a ward councillor and cabinet member said during 3ni's latest study visit: "If you really want to influence and make a change, everybody needs to be involved: communities, the public, private and voluntary sector."[24]

Harnessing existing networks, assets and infrastructure

- Should existing institutions, such as local authorities or strategic authorities (where they exist), be the home for a new ABI, or should new institutions be established?
- What are the pros and cons of public vs third sector anchor institutions?
- What are the pros and cons of establishing a new institution vs using existing institutions?
- How could a power sharing agreement between councils and communities look?
- What steps can be taken to insulate any ABI from financial, political or other pressures?

Research commissioned by Local Trust and carried out by Frontier Economics shows that achieving community priorities in the most disadvantaged areas requires strong relationships with existing local authorities and organisations.[25] However, it also highlights "the importance of building capacity in newly empowered communities to ensure they are able to do this effectively," which reflects the experience of Local Trust and 3ni in the importance of seeding the creation of new community-led and rooted institutions.

Depending on what is meant by 'be the home for', and on the length of the tenure, there may be value in existing local government structures supporting ABIs, at least by serving as accountable bodies and overseeing the distribution of a portion of funds according to resident priorities. They can also help incubate new arrangements to expedite implementation, avoid potential local conflict, and ensure that partnership working

23. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, *Sharing Prosperity: Community renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.* Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Policy-Short-2-Sharing-Prosperity.pdf
24. 3ni (2025), *Wigan Study Visit Report.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/3ni-Wigan-Study-Visit-71.pdf
25. Frontier Economics (2024). *Evidence on the importance of capacity building and community leadership in the success of local areas.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Evidence-on-capacity-building-and-community-leadership-paper.pdf

and community engagement begin as early as possible. Seeking to join up and collaborate with existing institutions and bringing local elected members on board as an additional resource and community champions would maximise the potential impact, in addition to marshalling potential streams of funding and solidifying the move to a more collaborative, joined-up approach to regeneration. Working closely within existing local authority structures could additionally benefit community groups in terms of helping them gain profile and visibility and a seat at the strategy table.[26] 3ni saw this first hand as community-led organisations came together with elected members and council officers to help steer the early conception and implementation of the 'Strengthening Communities' programme in Stoke-on-Trent.

Moving to a local neighbourhood partnership or other organisational model where space is created to provide for resident leadership should be an objective for any new ABI, informed for example, by the Big Local partnership board model, where residents and members of the community develop the capacity to lead decision making locally, drawing on the support services of a 'Locally Trusted Organisation'. This requires a clear intent to build a local community-led and owned vehicle to carry progress forwards sustainably, supported by long-term funding certainty, as is something envisaged in the current Plan for Neighbourhoods prospectus, with the ability to use funding for "establishing and running the Neighbourhood Board, including process to establish the board as a charity, community interest company, or other bottom-up organisational model, to sustain long-term investment." [27]

Ensuring there is a clear mechanism for building local community and resident control is critical, ensuring that delivery is seen to come from and be for the community as opposed to being imposed top-down or 'parachuted in', whilst also providing appropriate accountability mechanisms. Embedding new ABIs within a local authority could militate against this objective, and any move towards genuine community empowerment and resident-led regeneration.

Asset-based community development principles are fundamental to any attempt to establish, implement and embed new area-based initiatives. This means focusing on identifying and strengthening the networks, assets and organisations which already exist within communities. An ABCD approach ensures that investment is targeted to harness and build on the things that communities are proud of and that makes their area unique. It helps to avoid neighbourhoods being stigmatised through a deficit-focused approach and to foster alignment between interventions and the genuine needs and priorities of residents.[28]

26. Local Trust (2022). *Big Local relationships with public agencies*. Available at: https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Big-Local-relationships-with-public-agencies.pdf?mtime=20220609115227&focal=none
27. MHCLG (2025). *Plan for Neighbourhoods: prospectus*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus-and-tools/plan-for-neighbourhoods-prospectus#our-approach
28. Mcknight, John; Russell, Cormack (2022). *The Connected Community: Discovering the health, wealth and power of neighbourhoods*, BK Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc, 9781523002528.

The fundamentals of area-based initiatives

- How long is needed for genuinely long-term interventions? Ten years? Fifteen years? Longer?
- Should a community organiser or institutional model be taken through the delivery of the intervention?

3ni has heard from its members of the need for area-based initiatives to extend beyond electoral funding cycles. The success of the Big Local programme is testament to the transformational power of giving communities patient investment and capacity-building support over 12-15 years.[29] Experience of high-performing community-led area-based initiatives such as Ambition Lawrence Weston in Bristol, and Stoke-on-Trent's Portland Inn Project, detailed below, suggest a minimum of ten years is required before significant, truly transformational change is achieved, particularly when it involves large, capital-intensive projects emerging from and commissioned by the community.

It takes time to design and deliver interventions according to the specific needs of individual neighbourhoods that aim to nurture and support the priorities and aspirations of local residents. In those areas without the foundational building blocks of social infrastructure – such as the places and spaces to meet, and local community groups, networks and institutions that support a vibrant civic life and healthy stock of social capital that underpin a community's collective efficacy, it can be significantly harder to kickstart the sort of community-led activity that successful delivery of an area-based initiative needs.

We believe that such doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods with high levels of community need require long-term interventions, of at least 10 years, to provide the necessary timeline to build community capacity, engagement and residents' confidence to help lead regeneration. At 3ni's recent St. George's House consultation, it was observed that the growth of distrust in democratic and public institutions that has occurred across England is often higher in the poorest areas.[30] Rebuilding social capital might be a way of restoring that trust, but participants stressed that this would only be the case if projects are led and owned by local communities themselves, not imposed through top-down interventions.

There is no better illustration of the need for patient investment in practice than the Portland Inn Project, which is based in Hanley, in Stoke-on-Trent. Hanley is close to the city centre but has experienced numerous failed attempts at regeneration in recent decades, always through a top-down approach, such as the stalled Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder programme. This began to change when the local authority decided to sell some of the empty local houses for £1 – conditional on those who bought the properties committing to invest in their house and the local community.

The new homeowners included artists and community activists, who nurtured strong relationships with their neighbours, whilst also challenging the local authority and statutory services to provide better services. Portland Inn Project CIC sprang up, and the project was supported with multi-year investment through Local Trust's Creative Civic Change programme. This enabled Portland Inn Project CIC to grow its team and set up a Community Decision Making Panel. In response to a need for a community space in the neighbourhood, they also put a shipping container down on some open land, and used it as focal point for the community, including as a space to do arts activities, run repairs and create a youth club. This strengthened community resolve to continue investing in local social infrastructure; the group took on a derelict pub to turn it into community hub and social and cultural venue, now set to open in autumn 2025. Their momentum shows no signs of stopping; they have published a 100 Year Plan[31] for the neighbourhood and are currently exploring starting a community land trust to safeguard local civic assets.

29. Local Trust (2025). *Learning from Big Local.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/learning-from-big-local/
30. 3ni (2025). *A St George's House Consultation.* Available at: https://3ni.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/St-Georges-House-Report.pdf
31. https://theonehundredyearplan.com/

It takes time to build this kind of momentum, confidence and capacity. Ten years is the minimum timeframe to support communities to become stewards of their neighbourhoods, particularly in the neighbourhoods which experience the lowest levels of social infrastructure and therefore lack a natural springboard to kickstart community activity.

For these communities with the lowest levels of social infrastructure, a 'community organiser' model could help to galvanise initial activity. Community organisers go into neighbourhoods to build connections, listen to residents and help to motivate members of the community. This helps communities to build confidence to come together to take action around shared issues and their aspirations for where they live. Alternatively, a Big Local style approach has been proven to be highly effective in kickstarting community activity where it might not already exist: where community development experts support residents to come together in formalised partnerships and provide them with training, resources and advice to do so over a period of at least a decade.

Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (2019) conducted a thorough analysis for Local Trust on what works to achieve economic regeneration in the most disadvantaged areas.[32] The best-performing regeneration initiatives had the following characteristics:

- Neighbourhoods of around 10,000 people
- Local people in control of how resources are spent
- Bespoke initiatives, rooted in the particular characteristics of each neighbourhood
- Connections with economic opportunities outside the immediate area

Whatever model is developed for an area-based initiative, it is critical that it provides enough control, agency and flexibility for residents of individual neighbourhoods to direct investment as they see fit. The Big Local project emphasised the unique strengths and needs of every community and the need for regeneration programmes to avoid 'one size fits all' approaches, which fail to recognise this individuality.

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32. Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (2019). *Achieving local economic change: what works?* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Local_Trust_Achieving_local_economic_change_exec_summary_Oct_2019.pdf

3ni

Rewiring central government to 'think neighbourhoods'

> ### Neighbourhood Tests
>
> • Do you agree with the idea of a Neighbourhood Test?
> • When should it be carried out in the policy development process?
> • How do we avoid the Test becoming a 'tick box' exercise?

Introducing a Neighbourhood Test has the potential to catalyse a shift in public policy design and implementation in favour of the neighbourhoods most in need; as assessing and visualising a policy's impact on these communities, and on levels of social infrastructure and social capital becomes a normalised and entrenched part of the policymaking process.

3ni supports the additional foci of assessing and visualising policies' effects on social infrastructure, social capital and inequalities between neighbourhoods. Enabling civil servants and other policymakers to consider whether policy is building connections within and between communities could help to protect the inherent social value of the groups, networks, institutions and hubs which underpin strong communities, the services communities rely upon, and the means at their disposal to access opportunities. A Neighbourhood Test, with the requirement to look at the impact of a proposed policy or intervention, could also support discussions within government and the wider public sector about how public services operate, and their role in building social capital. This is something that the 3ni consultation at St George's House identified as an important next step, and how "social capital growth and retention might be embedded to improve public satisfaction and secure better results."[33] Such a test would help justify investment in building and supporting this foundational social infrastructure in neighbourhoods where it is lacking, and serve to help future-proof it from funding cuts and disinvestment as experienced during periods of austerity.

In modelling the design of any neighbourhood test, as well as the example of the Family Test given in the Green Paper, it would be useful to look at how the socio-economic duty, from Section 1 of the 2010 Equality Act might be applied in considering the impact of decisions on spatial inequalities at the hyper-local level. Although it has never been enacted nationally in England, it has been voluntarily adopted by some local and combined authorities in England and applied in England and Scotland. It requires that *"an authority to which this section applies must, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage."*[34] According to the Equality Trust, this could include mitigating inequalities linked to "place of residence or social class."[35] This, of course, has particular relevance to double disadvantaged neighbourhoods, which as we know experience worse outcomes than similarly deprived but better resourced and connected areas.

33. 3ni (2025). *A St George's House Consultation.* Available at: https://3ni.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/St-Georges-House-Report.pdf
34. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/1
35. https://equalitytrust.org.uk/project/socio-economic-duty/

For a Neighbourhood Test to have maximum impact, an accountability feature must be built in (or ideally, it would be made statutory). At the minimum, Tests should be made public or be readily available to be made public upon a freedom-of-information style request, with appropriate mechanisms for a complaints process, where it is felt that a Test should have been completed or has been completed unsatisfactorily.

> ### Tours for civil servants
>
> - Do you agree with the idea of Tours of Service in disadvantaged neighbourhoods for civil servants?
> - How often should tours be made?
> - How should they be organised to make sure that they are useful to both neighbourhoods and civil servants?
> - What opportunities are there for collaboration with local authorities and combined authorities?

Visits to local areas offer a valuable opportunity, among other things, to forge stronger connections between communities and policymakers, ensuring that a community's experience, voice and circumstances are heard by those responsible for policy development and implementation. They are also a means of facilitating knowledge exchange between local and central government, tackling Whitehall siloes and encouraging joined-up working with local and sub-regional government.

In particular, as a learning network to support local government and other public sector organisations work with communities to support change at the neighbourhood level, 3ni recognises the value of collaborative peer-learning through engagement with local residents and communities that are leading initiatives and building new community institutions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Our 3ni study visit to Wigan in October 2024[36] and forthcoming study visit to the north east is a good example of how effective in-person knowledge exchange between community members and policymakers can be.

3ni's members and community groups from across the country have often communicated feelings of disconnection between policymakers and communities. The idea that visiting and engaging with communities should be a mandatory service or duty for civil servants, or a component part of their training or continuing professional development, could be a low-cost but high-impact tangible solution to overcoming such disconnection.

Sensitivity to how the tours are framed and perceived is paramount. Neighbourhoods should not be externally defined in terms of their "disadvantage" or deficits, in keeping with an asset-based community development approach. The term "tours of service" should be avoided, given the connotations to military service, combat zones and an inferred sacrifice/saviour complex. Local Trust and 3ni have arranged visits for civil servants and parliamentarians alike and found that the language and framing of 'visits' resonates with both community members and policymakers.

Organisations such as 3ni could play a role in working with local government and community partners to convene visits with civil servants from multiple departments (e.g. MHCLG, Home Office, DCMS), to a particular locality or themed around a particular issue (e.g. anti-social behaviour). This is particularly important for civil servants working on programmes managed centrally, such as the Plan for Neighbourhoods, as well as non-state actors such as the National Lottery Community Fund leading on place-based funding programmes such as the Community Wealth Fund.

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36. 3ni and Local Trust (2025). *3ni Wigan Study Visit Report*. Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/3ni-Wigan-Study-Visit-71.pdf

Neighbourhood Analysis Excellence Centre

- Do you agree with the idea of a Neighbourhood Analysis Excellence Centre?
- What should be the mandate of such a centre?
- Where should it be based?
- How should it collaborate with external agencies?

3ni is supportive of the need to generate, synthesise, and curate the evidence, analysis and solutions around the challenges facing neighbourhoods, making it more accessible to policymakers, particularly those in local and central government. The work of ICON has done significant heavy lifting in this regard. Whilst it is clear we are now at the beginning of a new 'neighbourhoods moment', with social capital now "back on the map" having been somewhat neglected in the last 15 years of policymaking,[37] and continued momentum in policy and research on the role of social infrastructure investment, a key legacy of the work of Local Trust, its future salience is not guaranteed. The loss of institutional memory when it comes to previous neighbourhood policy and programmes is a case in point, for example, in relation to the expansion of neighbourhood management arrangements through the Neighbourhood Element of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (2005-10), with 3ni looking to identify learning and impact from the programme.

A Neighbourhood Analysis Excellence Centre may help to ensure that these policy issues and learnings from them maintain a place at the centre of government research and policymaking and that they remain an enduring part of public policy debate and practice. However, creating a new independent centre rather than locating such a new centre within government might enable it to best serve as "a bridge between government and civil society analysis of neighbourhoods." Such a centre would build on the evidence and case for neighbourhood-based community-led initiatives that have already been made and continues to grow stronger thanks to the work of organisations like Local Trust, 3ni, and ICON and the analysis, research and evidence they have commissioned.

It is important that this evidence is genuinely independent from government, along the lines of the UKRI's recent £10million investment into the Centre for Collaboration in Community Connectedness (C4), of which Local Trust is a partner. C4 will bring together partners from research, community, policy and civil society to develop and scale up successful community leadership approaches. The centre will house the CNI, protecting the legacy of the evidence base on the importance of social infrastructure in underpinning life outcomes and the need for investment in doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It will also raise engagement with the growing evidence base on the role of social infrastructure investment in neighbourhood regeneration.

A similarly independent centre, with academic credibility and buy-in from government and partners across the public and VCSE sectors, dedicated to neighbourhood analysis and with the possible remit of a 'What Works Centre', has the potential to deliver on the role envisaged by ICON. It could also be tasked with the evaluation of the Plan for Neighbourhoods, other government-sponsored neighbourhood initiatives, and place-based funding programmes and interventions such as the Community Wealth Fund.

37. Halpern, David; Haldane, Andy (2025). *Social Capital 2025: The hidden wealth of nations.* Available at: https://demos.co.uk/research/social-capital-2025-the-hidden-wealth-of-nations/

Social infrastructure policy

- Do you agree with the idea of a shared definition of social infrastructure?
- What should be included in that definition?
- Should bodies such as the National Infrastructure Commission and National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority be asked to consider social infrastructure as part of their remit?
- Should the government have a dedicated body to consider social infrastructure, given its unique characteristics?

Social infrastructure is a frequently used and increasingly common term. Popularised by Local Trust in its research into 'left behind' areas, through campaigns such as the Community Wealth Fund Alliance, hat sought to direct investment into foundational social infrastructure, and the development of the Community Needs Index to provide a quantitative measure (and hence definition) of social infrastructure at the hyper-local level, its importance is increasingly recognised. This is reflected in the growing interest in its contribution to improved life outcomes and opportunities, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

A key reason for this is the role played by social infrastructure in fostering and maintaining the local stock of social capital. Whilst this is something that is recognised by ICON and 3ni, its value is not yet universally shared. At 3ni's recent St George's House consultation participants explored how community-led initiatives and projects are often focused on nurturing social infrastructure and social capital to help make their communities better places to live and work.[38] Neighbourhood groups and grassroots organisations have worked hard to develop social networks, trust and relationships, sometimes with limited support from local government and larger, more established voluntary sector organisations, even feeling that at times their focus on the growth and nourishment of social relationships can be met with resistance from funders and policymakers.
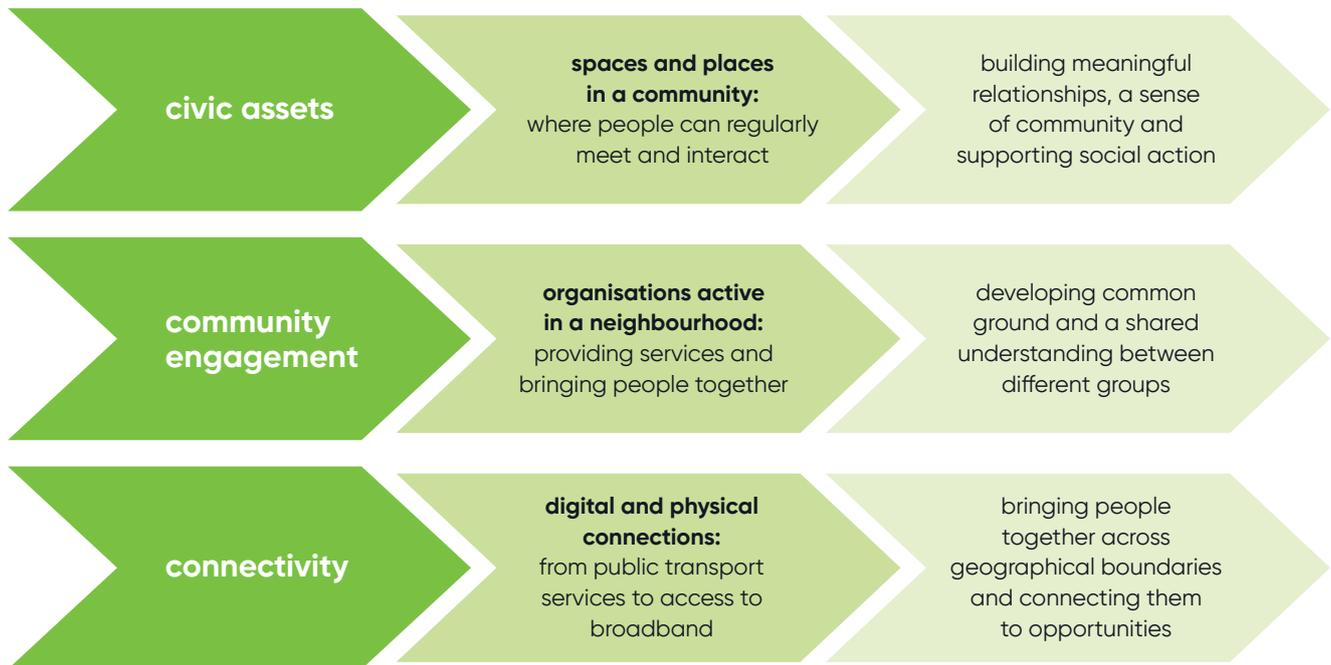
Social infrastructure can often mean different things to different people and organisations, including some concepts that are more tangible than others, and drawing on resources, responsibilities and actors from across the public, private and VCSE sectors. HM Treasury's definition of 'social infrastructure', for example, in the UK Infrastructure 10 Year Strategy narrowly confines it to "hospitals, schools and colleges, prisons and courts"). Firmly rooted in the public sector and role and responsibilities of the state, this definition fails to recognise the kinds of social infrastructure that are most valuable to communities and impactful on life outcomes (such as the spaces and places which bring communities together and foster community connectedness).[39]

3ni is supportive of a definition of social infrastructure that is rooted in the experience of local communities engaged in neighbourhood-based working and local social capital building. We would advocate for the use of the Community Needs Index as a tool to measure social infrastructure, and a definition of social infrastructure that is based on its three domains: civic assets, community engagement and participation, and connectedness. This is a definition adopted by the APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods.

38. 3ni (2025). *A St George's House Consultation*. Available at: https://3ni.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/St-Georges-House-Report.pdf
39. *UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy* (2025). Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6853c5db99b009dcdcb73649/UK_Infrastructure_A_10_Year_Strategy_Web_Accessible.pdf

Figure 1: Towards a shared definition of social infrastructure

civic assets	**spaces and places in a community:** where people can regularly meet and interact	building meaningful relationships, a sense of community and supporting social action
community engagement	**organisations active in a neighbourhood:** providing services and bringing people together	developing common ground and a shared understanding between different groups
connectivity	**digital and physical connections:** from public transport services to access to broadband	bringing people together across geographical boundaries and connecting them to opportunities

Source: APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods (2020). *Communities of trust: why we must invest in the social infrastructure of 'left behind' neighbourhoods.*
Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/8118-APPG-Communities-Report-NEW.pdf

Such a definition is flexible enough to provide a robust framework for developing a genuinely shared understanding of the concept, and which also leaves scope for specific adaptations. It can accommodate assets, services and facilities from the public, private and social sectors, and leave space for discretion locally. For example, whilst schools have a role to play in building social capital, as 3ni's research makes clear ("The evidence we have surveyed also makes a case for exploiting the protective factor of schools that can help create community bonds. We need to identify what already exists in local communities and build on these networks.")[40], this might not extend to those schools that are not genuinely inclusive or accessible to the local community.

Developing a shared understanding or definition of social infrastructure could be helpful in ensuring that policy and practice is supportive of its growth, and could potentially include extending the remit of the National Infrastructure Commission and National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority to develop a more nuanced picture of how social and economic infrastructure interact. Likewise, a dedicated body to consider social infrastructure could be of great utility, although there is a case to be made that resources and energy could be more effectively invested elsewhere, given diagnostic tools like Discovery already exist to support policymakers in local and central government to consider social infrastructure, measure it and design interventions and investments accordingly.

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40. Coutts, Adam; Mauricio Dias Velasuez, Diego (2025). *Social Capital 2025: A protective shield for children, families and communities.* Available at: https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Social-Capital-2025_Child-Outcomes.pdf

Neighbourhood Recovery Unit

- Do you agree with the idea of a new Neighbourhood Recovery Unit to coordinate government policy?
- Where should it be based and what should its remit be?
- Should the Unit create and lead a new Neighbourhood Recovery Strategy?
- What can we learn from the past to make this strategy effective?
- How do we ensure that neighbourhoods are able to shape this strategy and ensure the
- Unit remains grounded in the experience of those within disadvantaged neighbourhoods?

At 3ni's St George's House Consultation in March 2025, participants were firmly in favour of establishing a 'coalition of the willing' that would bring together those pushing for investment and support in social infrastructure and individuals and organisations involved in other critical, everyday infrastructures like housing, utilities and transport.[41] Such a coalition would have the potential to unlock skills, dialogue and drive investment to support the growth and development of social infrastructure in areas previously overlooked. This is particularly important given Local Trust's imminent closure, despite the work of 3ni to continue its policy and advocacy around the importance of investment and support in social infrastructure and social capital.

A Neighbourhood Recovery Unit could be a piece of this puzzle, in terms of coordinating cross-department collaboration within government and providing external stakeholders with a more transparent and accessible means of working with central government to deliver strategic change. However, the bridging of siloes within government is only worthwhile if a better bridge between government and the experiences of residents in doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods is simultaneously being built, as the Green Paper references. This could be achieved, for example, through an oversight or advisory board drawing its membership from residents of such neighbourhoods.

Any such Unit and attendant national strategy should seek to learn lessons from past neighbourhood-based regeneration programmes, particularly those of the last Labour government. It should draw inspiration from the previous Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, established in 2001, which was responsible for overseeing the delivery of 105 commitments in the Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan, including efforts to narrow the gap between England's most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. With the advent of combined authorities and ongoing local government reorganisation, there is a new role to play at the sub-regional level of government which needs to be properly explored in the creation of any new Unit and strategy.

The new unit should be the leading central government actor in the policy space for neighbourhoods and communities, drawing together and co-ordinating interventions and investment from across government departments. What should certainly be avoided is the plethora of often competing and overlapping departmental initiatives and programmes that were seen during that era.

Any such Unit should be committed to asset-based community development principles, dedicated to supporting community capacity building and resident leadership, in a way that recognises the unique qualities of individual neighbourhoods. Crucially, a new Neighbourhoods Unit would need to avoid imposing any top-down interventions and instead commit to being an advocate for nurturing grassroots resident leadership, synthesising the evidence base and coordinating action to support community-led regeneration from within Whitehall.

41. 3ni (2025). *A St George's House Consultation*. Available at: https://3ni.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/St-Georges-House-Report.pdf

Commissioner for Neighbourhoods

- Do you agree with the idea of a new Commissioner for Neighbourhoods?
- Where should it be based and what should its remit be?
- How should the Commissioner be appointed?
- How should the Commissioner interact with other parts of government (e.g. a potential Neighbourhoods Recovery Unit or Excellence Centre)?

3ni don't see that creating a Commissioner role would significantly further the neighbourhood regeneration agenda beyond what a new specialised Unit could achieve alone. Instead, effort should be focused on setting up a new Unit within Whitehall to drive a long-term devolution of power from government to neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood Recovery Zones

- What should the role of local authorities and combined authorities be in the development of these zones?

Neighbourhood Recovery Zones offer an opportunity to take radical action to reverse declining life outcomes in the neighbourhoods most in need, operating essentially as the recipient areas of any dedicated funding. A key question relating to them is in whether there is any difference in terms of a zone's governance arrangements. A more asset-based framing might be 'Opportunity Neighbourhoods' so as to avoid highlighting these areas' perceived deficits.

Policymakers could use Discovery and other tools to ensure funding was allocated to address core pockets of socio-economic deprivation and low levels of social infrastructure, given life outcomes in neighbourhoods can vary drastically within a tight geographic zone. Such a quantitative approach would need to be combined with qualitative methods of community engagement to ensure recipient areas reflected 'natural neighbourhoods'. Investment to drive neighbourhood recovery should focus on building up foundational social infrastructure and stocks of capital in the neighbourhoods where it is most lacking, as a sustainable way of increasing community resilience, health, wellbeing and boosting local economies. This makes it even more important that target neighbourhoods are identified at the most appropriate spatial scale and population footprint to ensure that social capital can be formed and maintained.

The principle of a randomly selected Residents Assembly could be a powerful tool to galvanise community engagement and provide the support (like childcare and pay) to enable residents in the most deprived areas to be able to participate. Of paramount importance is ensuring that regeneration is done with residents, as opposed to being done to them. Such a policy would need to be accompanied by the appropriate communications and messaging to ensure that residents of these neighbourhoods felt motivated to engage rather than feeling this was bureaucracy being forced on them. It would also require investment to build participants' confidence and capacity to participate, minded also to the need to regularly circulate membership.

If there are additional powers granted to the new governance structures for overseeing investment into these zones, e.g. to enable CPOs, then the local authority will need to have input, and to ensure a better alignment with existing plans and strategies. Combined Authorities would also need a formalised role in ensuring alignment between hyper-local policies and those operating across wider geographies. There may also be a role for the local authority to provide an independent person to convene public services (i.e. "Demanding that other public services come to the table and change policy or practice as required to improve outcomes", as at p.37 of the Green Paper). A comparable scenario is the ASB case review, which can be triggered by victims via the Police and Crime Commissioner, and it is common that an independent senior officer will convene, chair and develop an action plan from the meeting.

Responding to Chapter 3
Empowering local government to 'think neighbourhoods'

> **Spending on neighbourhoods**
>
> - Do you agree with the idea of a Neighbourhood Expenditure Audit?
> - Who should carry them out?
> - What spending should be in and out of scope?
> - How regularly should audits be undertaken?
> - How should central and local government effectively partner to deliver the Audits?

3ni has heard first hand from its members how difficult it can be to combat the opacity of information around where funding is being directed, by whom and for what within a locality, as well as evidencing outcomes and impact. In a period of such significant pressure on resources, it has never been more important to ensure that each pound invested in a neighbourhood and through a public service generates maximum impact. This necessarily entails greater collaboration, transparency and data-sharing between central and local government and others in the public sector and through social and private sector partners and providers to minimise duplication, coordinate resources and pursue shared objectives.

3ni supports the concept of Neighbourhood Expenditure Audits in all neighbourhoods identified as 'doubly disadvantaged', in addition to those identified as 'mission-critical', in recognition of the acute need in these communities and the impact that high levels of deprivation in combination with low levels of social infrastructure has on life outcomes.

Neighbourhood Expenditure Audits should be seen as a catalyst for more effective data-sharing and agile and responsive policy. This will likely require an agreement or memorandum of understanding, which leads to transparent and guaranteed data sharing. The audits should be repeated on a standing basis to ensure stakeholders can continue to benefit from the increased transparency and to drive alignment with a new approach to Total Place 2.0. This fits with the "intuitive" principle at the heart of Total Place: integrated services require clarity over how much is being spent and where.[42]

Over time, greater transparency in spending could help to move away from smaller, ring-fenced funding pots to greater certainty and flexibility in area-based spending. A challenge to this model is HMT's willingness to embrace a shift that would inevitably lead to greater expenditure in delivery. The opportunity to make savings in the long-term from reduced duplication and inefficiency is compelling, nonetheless.

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42. Institute for Government (2025). *The case for Total Place 2.0.* Available at: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Total_Place_2_0.pdf

Neighbourhood Agreements

- Do you agree with the idea of Neighbourhood Agreements?
- What lessons can we learn from the voluntary agreements within Total Place?
- How long should the agreements last?
- Who should monitor their implementation?
- Should there be any sanctions for breaching these agreements?

For neighbourhood policy to succeed, delivery must involve local government effectively working across service and organisational siloes in addition to partnership-working with voluntary, community and faith organisations, to strengthen the social fabric and safety net and address the complex network of factors which exacerbate deprivation. Research into Big Local partnership areas' relationships with four types of public agency, including local government, saw the identification of eight criteria for effective relationships, which could help to guide the development of Neighbourhood Agreements.[43] These tenets included mutual knowledge and understanding, trust and respect, common language and shared goals, defined roles but willingness to be flexible, and freeing up the capacity and ringfenced resources to follow through with agreed actions and decisions.

3ni supports the idea of Neighbourhood Agreements, building on the learnings from previous iterations of neighbourhood agreements, the curtailed Total Place programme, and Whole-Place Community Budgets as a means of driving more coordinated regeneration strategies. Importantly, they could also offer communities greater visibility and transparency in local service delivery and strategy.

3ni has heard from its members how difficult it can be in practice to coordinate spending and investment across local authority directorates, let alone with other public and third sector partners. **Neighbourhood Agreements offer an opportunity to combat service siloes and foster joined-up delivery, whilst harnessing the existing infrastructure that local authorities have at their disposal.**

3ni's latest research with OCSI examined the impact of resident-led neighbourhood-based initiatives.[44] The findings show that areas with neighbourhood-based initiatives perform better overall than benchmark areas across 7 indicators: out-of-work benefits, children in relative low-income households, overall crime rate, burglary rate, criminal damage, average property price, and local business activity, particularly in crime reduction, business growth, and relative child poverty outcomes. Neighbourhood Agreements could provide an opportunity to scale up the transformational power of resident-led neighbourhood-based initiatives.

43. Local Trust (2022). *Big Local relationships with public agencies.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Big-Local-relationships-with-public-agencies-September-2022.pdf
44. 3ni, Local Trust, OCSI, Shared Intelligence (2025). *Everybody needs good neighbourhoods 2: A counterfactual analysis of the impact of resident-led neighbourhood-based initiatives in deprived communities.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Everybody-needs-good-neighbourhoods-2.pdf

Neighbourhood Budgets

- Do you agree with the idea of Neighbourhood Budgets?
- What lessons can we learn from previous measures, such as Total Place / Community Budgets?
- How long should the budgets last?
- At what level of government should budgets be overseen and monitored?

Many of 3ni's members have called for regeneration budgets and place-based funding to be longer-term, more flexible, and co-created with communities. Neighbourhood Budgets could offer communities and residents greater transparency in, and flexibility over, how monies are invested locally, particularly if they adopt the approach and learnings from the Big Local model. This would ensure that when spend is allocated to support a Neighbourhood Agreement and its delivery areas, residents have a direct say over how at least a portion of the budget is used, potentially with a 'locally trusted organisation' acting as an accountable body and a partnership of residents steering investment.

3ni believe that 'doubly disadvantaged' neighbourhoods should be prioritised for neighbourhood budgets. The learnings from Big Local clearly demonstrate that the areas with the lowest levels of social infrastructure and the highest levels of deprivation have the most to gain through initiatives which give residents a greater say in how funds should be invested to improve their community's prospects and potential, and outcomes for local residents.

3ni supports the idea of developing a Total Place 2.0 approach, particularly at the hyper-local neighbourhood level, through coordinated area-based budgets from across the public sector, and potentially, beyond. Rather than adopt a local authority focus to delivering a new Total Place/Community Budgets approach, a 'One Neighbourhood' approach would involve local and central government and public agencies working within a specific geographical community at the hyper-local neighbourhood level to identify, analyse and evaluate what they collectively spend, both revenue and capital, and the totality of activities, outputs, services and infrastructure that it supports. It could also map the anticipated outcomes and impact, to understand how it aligns with organisational operational and strategic priorities, against the specific needs of the neighbourhood.

This would aim to identify any duplication in spend, as well as omissions and potential superfluous expenditure, enabling a bespoke and targeted approach to service design, perhaps based on shared zero-based multi-year budgeting and a genuinely collaborative commissioning environment, seeking the maximum input of the local community. This will help to bridge the gap between service users, commissioners and providers, as agencies are equipped with an opportunity to come together to critically examine what funding is going where to meet the locally-identified needs and priorities of the community, and a more holistic appraisal of how service providers could better coordinate spend and activity to ensure better value for money and efficacy.

Importantly, a 'One Neighbourhood' approach to shared local neighbourhood budgets should free up monies to push upstream, to invest in prevention and an opportunity to give service providers the latitude to think creatively about how things could be done better. Double running of services might be needed at some point in the process as part of the shift toward a more person-centred, human-scale and neighbourhood-specific model of service delivery. This transition involves breaking out of service and organisational silos and addressing the funding shortfalls providers have faced throughout austerity and since the pandemic, as the system moves away from a new public management ethos toward a more collaborative, relational and participatory paradigm.

Neighbourhood Respect Duty

- Do you agree with the idea of a Neighbourhood Respect Duty?
- How should it be administered?
- Should communities be able to trigger engagement with local authorities and other agencies?
- What should be the threshold for triggering an intervention?

The lack of meaningful engagement with local communities on the part of agencies such as the NHS, policing, and transport providers, as well as local government about the delivery of public services, described in the Green Paper, is a problem that communities engaged in neighbourhood improvement initiatives have sometimes encountered. The Neighbourhood Respect Duty might offer a safeguard against this reported experience: feeling disconnected to policymakers and that their expertise and input is neither sought nor valued.

Communities should be able to trigger engagement with local authorities and other agencies where appropriate thresholds are met. Such a threshold may be via a petition engaging a proportion of the local population or through an application to an appointed representative. This may require a national accountability mechanism to ensure compliance, with attendant risks of over-bureaucratisation.

Perhaps the language of 'Neighbourhood Respect Duty' could refer more directly to a Neighbourhood's Say or Voice to emphasise that it is more than a cursory nod to just 'respecting' neighbourhoods. Instead, it would provide a means by which residents can genuinely voice their concerns or opinions and expect to be taken seriously as experts in their localities.

Right to 'Call In'

- Do you agree with the Right to 'Call In' for local authorities and strategic authorities?
- How should the right be implemented? Which agencies or bodies should be in scope?
- What should be the end result of the 'Call In' process?
- How can local residents get involved in this process?

The suggested Right to 'Call In' for local and strategic authorities might be compared to the existing legislation for an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) case review (formerly Community Trigger). There would need to be a clear process to apply for a 'Call In' and an independent person to assess whether this should go ahead (e.g. the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner approves a case review for ASB and the police must attend at its instruction). The result could be an action plan with partner organisations assigned tasks (where each partner has agreed to this in the meeting), and the meeting could open with representatives of the public. The principle of solidifying an opportunity to pool resources and pursue shared objectives across target neighbourhoods is an important one.

3ni has seen first hand in Stoke-on-Trent the power of convening partners across the public sector and beyond to discuss common goals and to coordinate action relating to neighbourhood regeneration. This joined-up approach to design and implementation has led the local authority to be willing to take greater risks, putting the onus on capacity-building and devolving more power to residents to shape 'Strengthening Communities' interventions.

However, implementing a mechanism to enforce meetings might not deliver transformation where there is a fundamental disconnect between a community and a local or strategic authority. One need only look at government-mandated Local Partnerships in the delivery of the UKSPF or Towns Deal Boards to see that sometimes these partnerships fail to build new networks with local organisations that might not otherwise have already secured a seat at the table.[45]

The 'Call In' process should therefore be more ambitious in placing an onus on authorities to evolve their relational engagement by seeking out and inviting in those community-led organisations which do not already have a seat at the table. This would ensure that residents, as service users, are at the centre of conversations about how to improve service delivery.

Right to Request Time

- Do you agree with the idea of a Right to Request Time?
- How should it be administered?
- Who should be able to request time?
- Should local authorities or other public agencies be compensated centrally for any time given to neighbourhoods?

In practice, the Right to Request Time could help to build community capacity, meet skills gaps and assist community-led activity.

3ni has heard examples from its members of how small, medium and large businesses have played an integral role in getting community-led initiatives off the ground and supporting their ongoing delivery. These examples range from retailers supporting staff as Community Champions and making donations to community groups, to supermarkets donating food to community pantries, and local builders giving their time to carry out repairs and maintain community hubs and facilities. A shift to 'think neighbourhoods' requires communities to be enabled to benefit from support and resources of their local allies in the private, as well as the public and social sectors. However, it is not clear how frequent such requests would be made, approved or overseen, nor is it clear whether some of the requests could be better met through existing initiatives offered by a strategic authority (i.e. around skills development and business development).

The government might consider creating a certification for businesses who volunteer or donate a number of days per year to supporting local community organisations, like a BCorp or benefit corporation certification; as an incentive for small, medium and large businesses to seek out opportunities to support their local communities and to provide positive marketing to consumers and customers in turn, but this might risk bureaucratisation of a process. For the public sector, and local authorities in particular, rather than a right to request time, a contact point for brokering particular support, professional advice and resources for communities and neighbourhoods might be a more realistic proposition, for example, around legal and accountancy advice around asset transfer, leasing arrangements, etc.

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45. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, *Sharing Prosperity: Community renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund*. Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods. org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Policy-Short-2-Sharing-Prosperity.pdf

Right to Control Investment

- Do you agree with the idea of a Right to Control Investment?
- What investment should be in and outside of scope?
- Who should be able to request the right to participate in decision making?
- What should be the appropriate role for local and strategic Authorities in the Right to Control Investment?

The idea of a Right to Control Investment responds to the need for a greater devolution of power to residents and communities. 3ni's research in collaboration with OCSI and Shared Intelligence found compelling evidence that resident leadership in neighbourhood-based investment and initiatives improves community wellbeing, particularly in terms of reductions in overall crime, slower growth in child poverty, and stronger local business growth.[46]

However, the Green Paper acknowledges the low trust and engagement rates in many disadvantaged communities, due to years of underinvestment in critical social infrastructure, something that our discovery tool helps map and explore at the hyper-local level. The reality for residents in the most 'doubly disadvantaged' neighbourhoods is that there might not be the trusted local community institutions able to support a Right to Control Investment request. Such a request, like the 'rights' that were a feature of the 2011 Localism Act, require levels of engaged and active citizenry, with access to the time, opportunities, resources, experience and practical support, such as easy help with childcare that underpins local volunteering efforts.

This is why any Right to Control Investment must be accompanied by targeted funding and support to build confidence, social capital, social infrastructure and community engagement in "doubly disadvantaged" neighbourhoods. Without such critical investment, the more prosperous areas will be set to disproportionately benefit.

46. 3ni, Local Trust, OCSI, Shared Intelligence (2025). *Everybody needs good neighbourhoods 2: A counterfactual analysis of the impact of resident-led neighbourhood-based initiatives in deprived communities.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Everybody-needs-good-neighbourhoods-2.pdf

Responding to Chapter 4
A sustainable future for neighbourhoods

> ### Neighbourhood Mobilisation Formula
>
> - Do you agree with the idea of a Neighbourhood Mobilisation Formula?
> - What spending would qualify for the formula?
> - Should the formula be calculated over a set period (three years) or an annual basis?
> - What social infrastructure should qualify for 'activation' funding?

The Neighbourhood Mobilisation Formula could provide a valuable source of additional funding to push investment towards building social infrastructure in the most doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In a sense, any source of funding for social infrastructure investment is a good thing.

Research undertaken by the APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods found that local government and other actors working to effect local change often felt frustrated at the splintered funding landscape under the 'Levelling Up' era.[47] To avoid replicating such splintering and to advance the journey towards a One Neighbourhood or 'Total Place 2.0' approach to place-based budgets, it might make sense to synergise or align funding distribution with existing government programmes such as the Plan for Neighbourhoods, over a long-term time horizon.

> ### Neighbourhood Match Scheme
>
> - Do you agree with the idea of a Neighbourhood Match scheme?
> - How should foundations and private philanthropists be encouraged to match the resources of the government?
> - What resources should be in scope?
> - Do you agree with the idea of foundations or philanthropists sponsoring a neighbourhood alongside government to improve outcomes within a neighbourhood or cluster of neighbourhoods?

A Neighbourhood Match Scheme not only serves as a potential source of 'top-up' funding for the neighbourhoods most in need, but also as an opportunity to forge stronger links between civil society, private philanthropy and 'doubly disadvantaged' neighbourhoods.

Solidifying pathways for place-based giving could empower and equip residents with the tools to lead change. 3ni has seen first hand the power of civil society investment in community-led groups. On 3ni's study visit to Wigan, participants heard from Northern Heart and Soul (NH&S) about how an independent partnership with the charitable foundation Lankelly Chase, to the value of £140k over two years, facilitated a highly successful

47. APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods (2024). *Sharing Prosperity: Community renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.* Available at: https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Policy-Short-2-Sharing-Prosperity.pdf

initiate to reconnect people to one another across three neighbourhoods in Wigan West.[48] With the funding provided by Lankelly Chase, NH&S run a very well attended community hub, have boosted local social provisions and set up an innovative community lottery, where, after awarding a portion of the funds to the winner, participants then vote on which local project should receive the remaining funds. Not only has this ensured that resources directly support initiatives that matter most to residents but also boosted community capacity and engagement by providing a forum for neighbours to discuss the local issues and priorities which matter to them.

Importantly, a Neighbourhood Match Scheme would complement place-based funding from dormant assets through the Community Wealth Fund. It also has the potential to align with movement towards One Neighbourhood or 'Total Place 2.0' inspired whole place community budgets by simplifying routes to contribute, generating greater transparency in funding opportunities and encouraging private philanthropists and civil society donors to shift towards patient investment as opposed to short-term, project-based donations.

National Neighbourhood Endowment

- Do you agree with the idea of a National Neighbourhood Endowment?
- How should it be resourced?
- What neighbourhoods should qualify for investment?
- Should it be permanent or time-limited?

Setting up a National Neighbourhood Endowment could provide a dependable and powerful ally to neighbourhoods and a streamlined means by which funding can be channelled and distributed, on a long-term basis and beyond electoral cycles and changing fiscal circumstances and priorities.

Nevertheless, directing resources and energy to set up a new institution might distract from the real mission: that is catalysing a devolution of power from local and central government to communities. Institutionalisation risks taking the onus off adapting our current systems of power and governance for the better to connect decision-makers in government to residents in neighbourhoods. The Green Paper notes the vulnerability of institutions to electoral cycles.

There is compelling evidence to suggest that government should lead the shift to "think neighbourhoods": with central government supporting local government through long-term, funding stability.

During 3ni's study visit to Wigan Council last year, participants heard about Wigan's pioneering work to do exactly that through its new mission 'Progress with Unity', building on the groundbreaking legacy of the 'Wigan Deal'.[49] For the council, Progress with Unity is not just a policy framework, but a movement grounded in shared ownership and collective action which is human-centred and committed to continual development. In addition to missions, the framework has six commitments at its core: seeing the person, listening deeply, knowing the place, showing love and pride, doing the right thing and **connecting to neighbourhoods**.

It is this kind of relational engagement and community-centred practice by local and central government that has the power to truly transform neighbourhoods and bridge the gap between residents and policymakers.

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48. 3ni (2025). *Wigan Study Visit Report.* Available at: https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/3ni-Wigan-Study-Visit-71.pdf
49. Ibid.

Mission Bonds

- Do you agree with the idea of Mission Bonds for mission-critical neighbourhoods?
- How should a fund be structured?
- What would be the risk of social investment in disadvantaged neighbourhoods?
- Should Bonds be centrally administered or should combined authorities or local authorities be able to raise their own mission bonds?

Mission bonds could play a key role in enabling private capital markets to drive regeneration in neighbourhoods. The evidence demonstrates time and again that resident-led investment to build social infrastructure and social capital in neighbourhoods where it is lacking is an effective means of improving community health, wellbeing, resilience, cohesion and local economic outcomes. ICON's call for a minimum 10-year maturity reflects the patience required to deliver tangible and sustainable community-based outcomes.

A particular focus on building social capital and infrastructure could deliver the sort of quantifiable outcome which would facilitate the Fund's careful monitoring of improvements in neighbourhoods, from measuring increases in the numbers of activities and clubs in a community, to tracking attendance at them, monitoring job creation or assessing changes in health and wellbeing outcomes through self-reported surveys, and as the Green Paper sets out, also tracking the direct cashable savings to the Exchequer.

The data the Fund collected to monitor impact would feed into wider efforts to improve data monitoring and impact tracking in neighbourhood-based initiatives, as well as supporting a move to a One Neighbourhood approach or Total Place 2.0 by incentivising investment to improve neighbourhood outcome analytics.

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