



Left
Behind
Neighbourhoods

Session 9 briefing: cleaner, safer, greener?

Liveability in 'left behind' neighbourhoods

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This briefing was researched, written and produced by Local Trust, Secretariat to the APPG for 'left behind' neighbourhoods.

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Informed by new research commissioned for the APPG, this briefing examines liveability in 'left behind' neighbourhoods; what can be done to help improve how local areas look and feel, and how communities can be better supported and resourced to take action to make their neighbourhoods safer, cleaner and greener.

At a glance

The latest data dive (OCSI, 2021) commissioned for the APPG shows that 'left behind' neighbourhoods have:

- **A lower concentration of green assets (272.9 per 100,000)** than other deprived areas (366.1 per 100,000) and England as a whole (356.4)
- **A lower concentration of recreational green space (5.8 percent)** than the average across urban England (6.9 percent) and other deprived areas (8.7 percent)
- **Higher recorded incidents of criminal damage (17.8 per 1,000 people)** compared with other deprived areas (16.6) and England as a whole (9.0)
- **A relative lack of development**, with a lower proportion of new build houses as well as a higher proportion of vacant and undeveloped land

In addition, research for the APPG by the University of Liverpool's Geographic Data Science Lab using satellite-derived data to produce typologies of how places have evolved over time shows that many 'left behind' neighbourhoods have seen little change in land use since 2012, or have seen changes that have helped contribute to them remaining 'left behind', e.g. increased rural urbanisation or agricultural diversification without accompanying social infrastructure and a lower rate of localised industrialisation compared to other deprived areas (Darlington-Pollock et al., 2021).

What is liveability?

Liveability reflects the overall wellbeing of a community and is made up of multiple, interacting characteristics that make a location a place where people want to live both now and into the future (Lowe et al., 2013, p. 11). Low liveability and poor-quality living environments are a significant factor in multiple deprivation, whilst also contributing to negative perceptions of an area and low levels of community engagement. These elements can combine to reinforce a cycle of decline (OCSI, 2021). Action to improve the local environment through addressing liveability issues form key planks of regeneration strategies.

Liveability in 'left behind' neighbourhoods

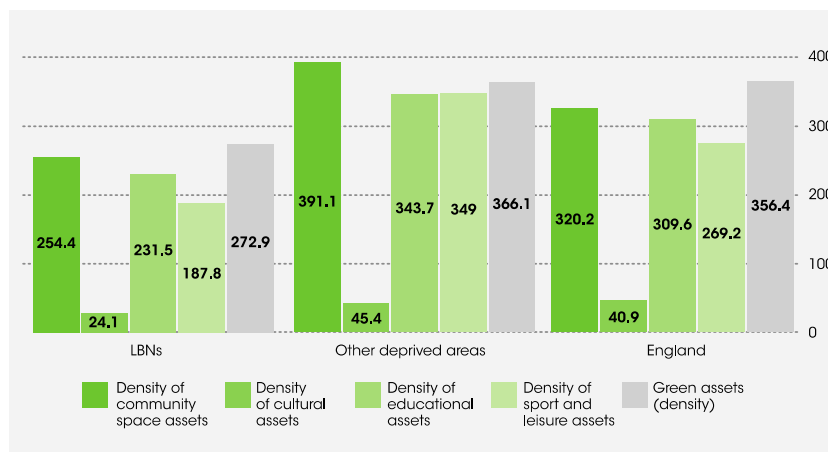
'Left behind' neighbourhoods often suffer from what has been described as 'poor place quality' – challenges stemming from the local built environment that adversely affect how areas look and feel (Create Streets Foundation, 2021). This can include a lack of green and

recreational spaces, problems with traffic, litter, and pollution, as well as high rates of crime or anti-social behaviour. This contributes to feelings of lower status and a lack of pride in the local area (ibid).

Polling by Survation (2021) for Local Trust asked residents what they liked least about their local area: 40 percent cited the poor condition of roads and pavements, over a third (34 per cent) felt that the local environment was not looked after (e.g. because of litter and graffiti) and 17 per cent were concerned about run-down parks and public spaces.



In the same survey, 50 per cent or more of respondents thought that community, leisure, and sports facilities were in need of increased resources, along with local parks and places to meet. 'Left behind' neighbourhoods have lower levels and considerably less access to these types of social infrastructure that underpin quality of life and civic pride. They have lower densities of civic assets compared to other deprived areas and the national average.



Source: AddressBase 2021

Greener?

With more people staying closer to home, the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of liveable, connected communities and the quality of the local environment. During lockdowns, parks and community green spaces became vital sites for exercise, recreation and social interaction (The Parks Alliance, 2020). Research conducted by the Office for National Statistics (2021) found that access to nature and local green space has played a significant role in supporting people's wellbeing over the course of the pandemic.

Residents of 'left behind' neighbourhoods are less able to experience the social benefits of parks and green space, with a lower concentration of green assets (including public parks, nature reserves, playgrounds, playing fields and picnic/barbeque sites) and lower coverage of recreational green space than other deprived areas in England (OCSI, 2021). As well as bringing individual wellbeing benefits, these civic assets make a significant contribution to our national wellbeing: for example, a review conducted by Public Health England found that Birmingham's parks and green spaces bring an annual net benefit of £600 million to society, including £192 million in health benefits. In Sheffield, each £1 spent on park maintenance is accompanied by a £34 saving in health costs, with local residents being the primary beneficiaries (Public Health England, 2020, p. 12).

Quality, design, and upkeep are important factors in people's perceptions of green space. These factors can influence the extent to which spaces are used and bring broader positive benefits. Studies have shown that while well-maintained green space can help to reduce anti-social behaviour, space that is poorly maintained can have the opposite effect (Public Health England, 2020, p. 25). 'Left behind' neighbourhoods also have twice the rate of undeveloped land compared to England – with 1.6 percent compared to 0.8 percent – as well as a greater proportion of vacant land than other deprived areas and nationally (OCSI, 2021). This can be a blight and negatively impact community wellbeing while contributing to broader health inequalities (Scottish Land Commission, 2020).

Safer?

At the same time, crime and fear of crime feature regularly as key issues affecting individuals, communities and the wider public realm., with a relationship between crime, the management of the local environment and policing that was popularised through 'broken windows' theory. Whilst contested, the theory points to the importance of neighbourhoods that appear looked after and cared for, where litter, graffiti or "one un-repaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing" (Kelling and Wilson, 1982).

Crime can have a detrimental impact upon people's quality of life and the quality of the local environment in a number of ways: individuals can be victimised physically (e.g. assaulted), materially (e.g. burgled), or psychologically (e.g. afraid to leave the house or walk alone after dark). The negative effects of crime are not just restricted to those individuals who are personally victimised, but also transfer to friends, family, neighbours and colleagues (OCSI, 2021, p. 19).

'Left behind' neighbourhoods have a higher incidence of robbery, criminal damage, and other criminal offences compared to other deprived areas and to the national average – however, levels of anti-social behaviour and violent crime are lower than other deprived areas, a factor likely linked to their location outside of inner-city areas and away from the night-time economy (OCSI, 2021). Findings from the 2008 Crime and Communities review, conducted by Baroness Casey of Blackstock, DBE, found that the public wanted more progress by police in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour with priorities for action identified and agreed with local residents (Cabinet Office, 2008).

Cleaner?

There is evidence of a strong relationship between neighbourhood deprivation and ongoing issues with higher levels of air pollution, rubbish, and litter (Cruickshank, 2021; Hastings et al., 2009; Keep Britain Tidy, 2015). 'Left behind' neighbourhoods show high levels of deprivation on the Outdoors Living Environment sub-domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, suggesting that whilst they have lower levels of deprivation around poor quality housing than comparators, they are potentially more likely to experience issues relating to air quality and road traffic accidents (OCSI, 2021).

Time-limited, annual initiatives including Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean can encourage community action in combatting litter in local areas, but such initiatives require established community groups which are absent from the most 'left behind' neighbourhoods.

Disadvantaged areas have in the past received targeted support through initiatives which help local residents to play a bigger role in the stewardship of their local area and have greater influence over local public services. A good example is the Neighbourhood Management programme introduced in 2005 with funding to establish and respond to a local community's needs (Robinson & Townsend, 2016). Over the past decade, the Big Local programme – which is delivered by resident-led partnerships – has seen many groups prioritise local environmental improvements, e.g. through employment of local Tidy Town workers, building networks of local groups committed to improving how their community looks and feels.

Policy context

The Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities recently referenced "helping to restore pride in place" as a crucial pillar of the government's vision for levelling up, along with improving local leadership, living standards, and the quality of public services (Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, 2021).

This builds upon previous iterations of government policy, including the 2019 *Communities Framework* which emphasised the importance of local civic pride, shared community spaces, and active citizenship and local control (MHCLG, 2019a).

Recent policy approaches have facilitated varying degrees of community involvement in improving local quality of life issues, from smaller initiatives such as funding for Pocket Parks (MHCLG, 2019b) and a £9.75 million High Streets Community Clean-Up Programme (MHCLG, 2019c) to bigger funding that falls under the Government's broader levelling up agenda.

Community Ownership Fund: launched in 2021, it will provide £150 million over the next four years to support community ownership of local assets or amenities at risk of closure, including sporting/leisure facilities and parks (DLUHC, 2021).

The Towns Fund, announced in July 2019 with a total funding of £3.6 billion, stated that “where possible, communities should be part of originating ideas, setting objectives and visions rather than just giving feedback on proposals” (MHCLG, 2020, p. 19).

Levelling Up Fund is targeted at “local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities” with plans for transport schemes, urban regeneration, and cultural assets. Within England, bidding authorities are encouraged to consult local stakeholders including community representatives in their applications (HM Treasury, 2021).

Local Nature Recovery Strategies: (LNRS) are a flagship initiative within the Environment Bill to introduce a requirement to agree local priorities for helping nature and improving the wider environment, with pilots taking place between August 2020 and May 2021. The production of each LNRS will be a collaborative process between public, private and voluntary sectors, as well as being locally-led (DEFRA, 2021).

Supporting community-led approaches in ‘left behind’ areas

A review of previous regeneration initiatives in the United Kingdom and abroad found that long-term success is best achieved from community involvement, rather than less-meaningful community consultation (Tanner et al., 2021). The authors found that regeneration initiatives such as alleviating crime should be conducted at the hyper-local level. In many cases, community-led approaches to improving local quality of life issues are accompanied by broader co-benefits, such as climate-positive outcomes (APPG, 2021a).

Other approaches such as neighbourhood planning – introduced under the Localism Act of 2011 – have given communities greater power over the long-term development of their local areas. Research on the impacts of neighbourhood planning conducted by the University of Reading for the government found that it provides benefits to both local communities and the built environment. However, uptake of neighbourhood planning to-date has been uneven (Parker et al., 2020), and as IPPR (Webb et al., 2021, p. 35) has noted, “these plans are still contingent on some level of local government support and so do not fully enable independent community action” with “a far greater proportion of the plans [being] developed in more affluent areas with a much lower concentration in areas with high deprivation.”

Most importantly from the point of view of 'left behind' neighbourhoods with lower levels of social infrastructure, residents have less capacity to respond to local issues and challenges and access external resources to support independent community action (APPG, 2020). They are also less able to access and benefit from many of the government's policies and current approaches to funding which risk not reaching the most 'left behind' areas, which struggle to access competitive funding pots and have less 'shovel ready' projects.

Empowering residents and the community to take greater responsibility for their local areas, improving liveability and boosting civic pride will require investment and support to rebuild local social infrastructure in those areas where it is noticeably lacking, and to enable them to take advantage of opportunities such as community asset ownership. The APPG found that community-owned assets help to build pride and confidence, and improve people's sense of wellbeing and overall quality of life, but that 'left behind' neighbourhoods have lower levels of community asset ownership than other deprived areas and nationally (APPG, 2021b)

Case studies

The 20-minute neighbourhood

There is growing interest in the idea of the '20-minute neighbourhood', focused on creating places where daily community needs can be met within a 20-minute walk, cycle, or public transport trip from residents' homes (Darlington-Pollock et al., 2021). This approach has multiple benefits including increasing wellbeing, decreasing traffic and air pollution, as well as strengthening the local economy and civic life (Town and Country Planning Association, 2021). It is particularly relevant for residents of 'left behind' neighbourhoods who travel greater average distances to access green spaces than other deprived areas (OCSI, 2021).

Safer streets in Stonehouse (Plymouth, Devon)

A portion of funding awarded under the 2020 Home Office Safer Streets initiative was used in Stonehouse to establish a local community grant programme targeted at deterring crime, anti-social behaviour and improving safety in public spaces. Grants were administered by a group of Stonehouse residents, ranging from £250 for smaller projects and up to £3,000 for larger projects with the potential to generate lasting change within the community. The panel awarded over £40,000 to 24 projects, including solar lighting for a new community space and equipment for a local park (Local Government Association, 2021).

Fenham Pocket Park (Newcastle)

Fenham Hall Drive was a car-dominated street characterised by unregulated parking on pavements and a lack of public space. This prevented local residents from gathering near local civic institutions including the library and community pool. With support from architects at the University of Newcastle, a group of volunteers known as the 'Friends of Fenham Pocket Park' were awarded £15,000 from MHCLG for the construction of a Pocket Park in the space. The space has been used for community events and has since been awarded a grant to further extend the park (Mallo & Tardiveau, 2020).

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About the APPG on 'left behind' neighbourhoods

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods is a cross party group of MPs and Peers. It is committed to improving social and economic outcomes for residents living in 'left behind' neighbourhoods, through the development and advocacy of hyper-local initiatives and policies. The group will look at ways to support and rebuild these communities following the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, to ensure they are stronger and more resilient in the future.