

PATHWAYS TO PLACE PROGRESS

At the People & Places Partnership, we are in the business of helping get 'more smiling faces in places'.

We realise that these are uncertain times for councils, communities and commercial partners, faced by what seems an increasingly complex national policy picture combined with an ever-deepening set of local issues. We can help by using our knowledge of national and regional place policy to link to with our tried and tested good practice that bring results at the local level.

We pride ourselves on being good at unpacking place policy and practice, to find achievable ways to improve neighbourhoods, towns and city centres. That's why we have put together our new programme for '[delivering pathways to place progress](#)', through the practicalities of 'partnerships, plans and projects'.

We have also learnt over time though, that it can be helpful to focus on a simple shared objective that partners can readily reflect on. That's why sometimes we simply say that we are in the business of helping place partners in "[getting more smiling faces in places](#)". A measure that we think helps identify common ground across disciplines.

Web: www.people-places.net

Email: services@people-places.net



**& PEOPLE
PLACES**

Smiling faces in places

A can-do guide



Pathways to place progress

Delivering partnerships, plans & projects



PURSUING PATHWAYS TO PLACE PROGRESS

Our '[pathways to place progress](#)' approach gets results. It offers a holistic approach built on our experience in preparing the national 'revitalising town centres toolkit' for the Local Government Association and our track record of applying it in around 50 places, illustrated by our work in [Suffolk](#) and [North Yorkshire](#). It extends this distinctive approach in a way that focuses as much on the 'how' (people & partnerships) as the 'what' (plans & projects) of revitalisation.. That way progress happens.

A 3-STAGE PROCESS TO SMILING FACES

As an iterative process that works alongside councils and communities, it's helpful to think of the approach in three stages that help create wide and lasting change by transferring knowledge and building local capacity:

Stage 1: Partners & priorities. Quickly getting up-to-speed on the best ways forward.

Stage 2: Process & planning. Checking-out potential issues & opportunities in more detail.

Stage 3: Participation & projects. Developing policies, projects and activities to deliver progress in your place.

"Local needs are best met by involving communities, key groups & businesses from the outset"

Taking a joined-up approach

There will be groups or individuals championing single issues or solutions in your neighbourhoods, towns or city centres. Such passions can be a good place to start though places do not work like that. Our pathways to place progress programme helps councils & place partners to take an informed approach to joined-up working.

This guide looks at the partnerships, process and practicalities for getting 'more smiling faces in places'. This includes drilling down in the detail through our pioneering approach to improving the journey from 'sofa to shop' and boosting 'pride in 'place'.

PROFILE: ACTION PLANNING IN NORTH TYNESIDE

Wallsend and Whitley Bay are two North Tyneside towns that are only six miles apart. Like many neighbouring towns though, there are clear differences in their purpose, the people they serve and priorities faced.

This inspiring [tale of revitalising two towns](#), tells about the approach to unite council, community and business interests in turning-around the towns by 'bringing facts and faces to places'. Wallsend was named a winner in the Visa Let's Celebrate Towns Awards 2025.

"Early engagement & evidence, embraces the distinctive performance, perceptions & priorities of places."



Tailoring revitalisation to towns
Action planning in Wallsend & Whitley Bay

Tailoring to towns

If you are looking to help bring more smiling faces to your neighbourhood, town or city centre, there are two salient principles that you need to have in mind from the outset. They are demonstrated in this tale of revitalising towns in North Tyneside.

ONE: It is an often-said truism, that no place is the same.

TWO: The fortunes of places & the people that live and work within them are inextricably linked.

As part of our work in Wallsend and Whitley Bay, for example, this involved interviewing over a third of businesses and surveying 742 and 1,346 customers, respectively.

Customers' priorities for Wallsend were dominated by diversifying the business mix, improving the town centre's appearance and strengthening the local ability to deliver. There were also strong customer calls to increase the sit-in hospitality offer, whilst businesses' priorities also included improving promotion of the town to help boost footfall.

Customers' priorities for Whitley Bay were dominated by improving parking and travel, diversifying the business mix and improving the town's appearance and accessibility.

PROFILE: PARTNERSHIPS IN CAUSEWAY COAST & GLEN

It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it!

At People & Places we are delighted when a local authority asks us to look at how they work to support local town centre revitalisation. That is especially the case when the request comes from an authority like Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in Northern Ireland, that is looking to build on already good practice.

This case study of [how to turn-around town centres](#), focuses on collaborative placemaking by reviewing how the Council supports communities in revitalising six town centres.

"Progress depends as much on joined-up working, as bright ideas & resources"



ACHIEVING INFLUENCE AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

It is important to assess the relationships between people, places & different levels of government. From our work immersing ourselves in Council policies, procedures and plans for working with places and speaking to 25 key stakeholders, we found the following opportunities to recognise & revise roles.

Strengthening liaison on national policy:

- Exploring synergies with Northern Ireland High Street Task Force Report
- Pursuing potential to be key part of rolling-out of Living High Streets Programme

Formalising Borough-wide brokering:

- Facilitating coordinated town-based delivery across Council services
- Increasing direct, joint work between key place-based services such as regeneration, events and destination management
- Recognising & measuring the depth and breadth of impacts across the Borough's towns

Supporting local partnerships:

- Evolving the role of Town Centre Forums towards greater collaborative placemaking
- Supporting the development of evidence-based and coordinated plans for each town.



Boosting pride in place

Steps for putting smiling faces on streets

**PEOPLE
PLACES**

AT THE HEART OF CREATING SMILING FACES IN PLACES

Pride in place can be used as a measure of how people like where they live and what matters to them. It can be considered as an outward expression of meeting local needs by creating liveable places. It can also be a counterbalance to negative narratives often portrayed on social media and a focus for engaging people in positive progress in the way places necessarily evolving. In its simplest form, we have long said it is about 'putting more smiling faces in places'.

FREE & FAST COURSE ON BOOSTING PRIDE IN PLACE

We have created a 'fast and free' course on [boosting pride in place](#) with global trainers Placemaking Education

The short, introductory course covers what is meant by 'pride in place', how it is created, the importance of underpinning it with engagement, evidence and empowerment. It weaves-in the tale of how one town in the North of England, successfully boosted local pride in place through community-led action.

"Pride is a sentiment felt by people about places that matter to them"

10 steps for boosting local pride in place

In our extended feature, we share 10 tried & tested steps for [boosting pride in place](#):

1. Work across issues and policies
2. Put partnerships in place
3. Involve, empower and co-create
4. Improve the journey into town
5. Create public spaces for people
6. Diversify the business mix
7. Create community-owned enterprises
8. Embrace heritage and culture
9. Change the narrative and build the brand
10. Manage, monitor and share success

PROFILE: UNDERSTANDING PARTICIPATION & PRIDE

Pride in place is built on people's sense of attachment and involvement in shaping familiar neighbourhoods, towns and city centres. Here, I share a "[younger view on pride in place](#)" than is perhaps familiar to many decision-makers, as an example of how to broaden and adapt approaches to boosting it.

This summary and wider work is gleaned from detailed analysis undertaken by the People & Places Partnership, of some of the findings from 175,000 responses to the Government's Community Life Survey.

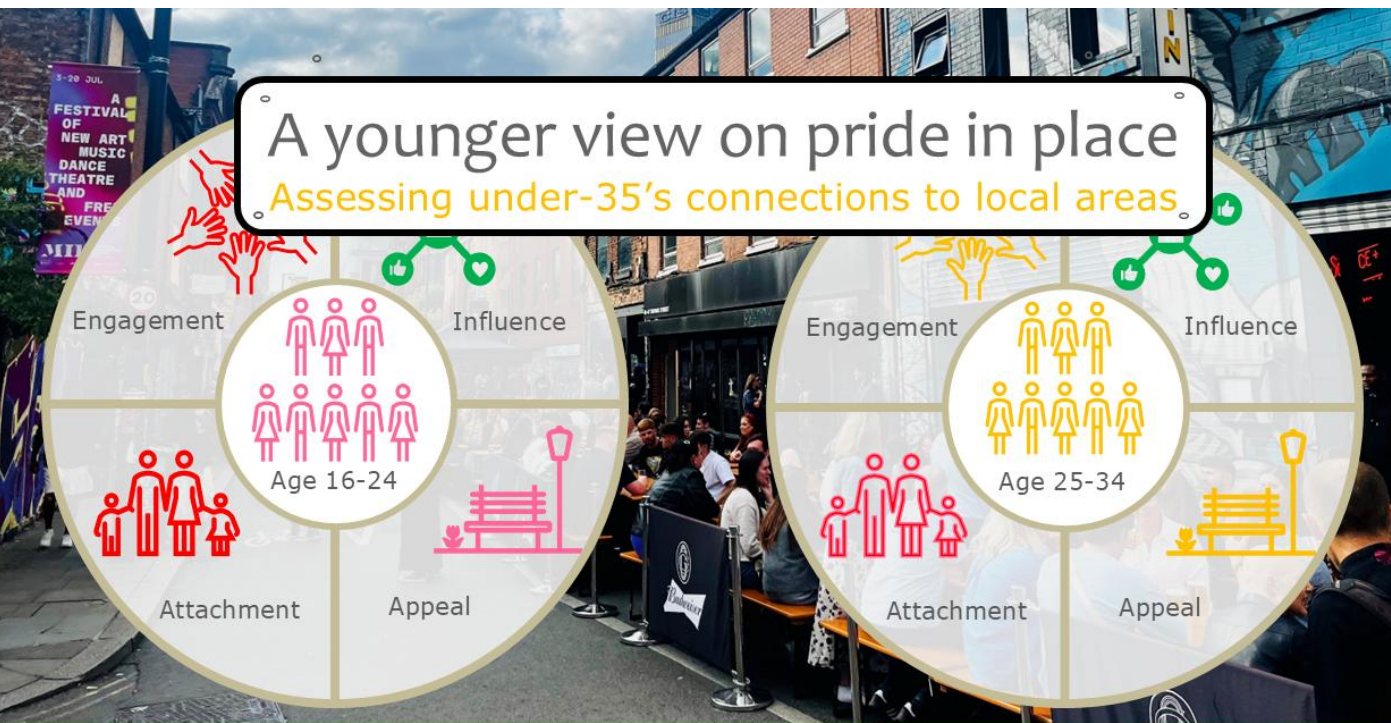
"Younger people's more limited pride in places, makes them more welcoming of progress"

A YOUNGER VIEW OF PRIDE IN PLACE

Through our analysis we have developed an understanding and key performance indicators for the underlying components for increasing pride in place, including 16- to 24-year-olds.

By being aware of the different requirements for engaging groups such as young people and framing their likely responses, we begin to develop a more tailored approach to boosting pride in place and other aspects of shaping local areas. This includes understanding:

1. *Challenging levels of civic engagement:* In designing community engagement plans, it is important to understand that younger audiences are more challenging to involve in traditional ways.
2. *Modest expectations of influence:* Younger audiences are less invested in places though also less likely to be disgruntled about not being engaged.
3. *People's aging attachment to places:* When it comes to people's attachment to their local area, the very strong indication is that it is a relationship that strengthens with age.
4. *Youth's limited pride prompts progress:* Younger people's more limited pride in place and its past, appears to make them more welcoming of progress.





Sofa to shop



TOUCH POINTS FROM ON-LINE TO ON-STREET

When we sit at home on sofas, it's when choices are made -or not- to surf online, drive to a retail park, or possibly travel into town! It's a journey that often begins on-line though that must deal with perceptions and practicalities on-street. In marketing terms, the barriers and incentives that crop-up as we make decisions about travelling into town are known as 'touch points'. We embrace this thinking in our approach to [improving the journey from sofa to shop](#).

TAKING THOSE FACES TO ENJOY PLACES

Our aim in improving the journey sofa to shop is to smooth-out any perceived and practical bumps in chain of connected thoughts and physical travel that takes people into town.

It's an approach that goes hand-in-hand with our wider work to support place partnerships and boost pride in place. Ultimately what seem like complex choices, can combine positively to deliver the core outcome of 'putting more smiling faces in places'.

"Choices made on the family sofa are key to the future success of our town and city centres"

Taking 3 steps to town

In improving the overall journey from sofa to shop, we bring together three facets of our work that connects people & places.

ONE: *Refreshing place brands & identity.*

We help build place identity the 'inside out' to create new narratives and experiences of places.

TWO: *Traveling into and around town.*

We turn on-street touch points into a positive experience that creates a seamless journey.

THREE: *Linking parking with people & place.*

Our People, Places and Parking Process provides national good practice in [improving travel, parking and access to town and city centres](#).

PROFILE: THE EASE & APPEAL OF A TRIP TO TOWN

As People & Places, we helped in [improving access and signage in the 'Malverns'](#), in a study commissioned for five town centres.

This work took a broad approach to understanding and then improving people's journey to town, involving: an assessment of approach, signage, sense of arrival; an assessment of pedestrian signage; a summary of itemised recommendations for physical access and signage improvements; wider recommendations on the potential access improvements; stakeholder engagement.

"What helps visitors to have a good first impression and get the most out of a visit?"



Improving access & signage in the Malverns
Analysis of wider issues & detailed action planning

Engaging stakeholders in improving access

As part of our work reviewing access and signage in the Malverns, we worked closely with the District Council and involved local stakeholders, including business groups and town councils, in sharing insights on how the town centres are used. This [short video](#) introduces our approach to stakeholders.

Issues identified in our initial review included:

- Presenting a towns' identity to visitors
- The importance of first impressions
- Awareness of importance of key arrival points for different types of users
- Working with attractions, services, events & businesses to promote arrival points.
- Making the most of existing wayfinding
- Assessing and improving accessible routes linked to Blue Badge parking.
- Matching parking provision to different customers' needs.

The work then involves the production of a detailed action plan for addressing these initial issues by improving:

- a. Online awareness ahead of a visit
- b. Improved signage of key routes to town
- c. Orientation, waymarking and placemaking to guide pedestrians around town

All recommended improvements were delivered to a prioritised schedule.

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Each of our assignments through the [People, Places & Parking Process](#) is different and brings its own challenges and opportunities. In Oldham, our work has focused on [balancing parking and access during town transformation](#), while continuing to improve it. Understanding why and how we go into town centres is an important part of making them busier and more enjoyable. It was vital in underpinning our work in Oldham by assessing the changing ways people will travel as its town centre offer is transformed.

"A customer-focused approach to help residents, visitors & workers make the right travel choices"



A plan for improving parking & place

The following prioritised recommendations were presented to the Council and key stakeholders, backed by detailed evidence and a breakdown of next steps.

QUALITY -Managing the Parking Journey & Experience

- Improving journey to car parks (high)
- Onward journey to town centre and attractions (medium)
- Investment and innovation, including safety, accessibility and user satisfaction (high)

QUANTITY -Balancing Supply and Demand

- Investigate and consult on options for changing permit system for workers (high)
- Tracking changing demand and parking suitability (high)
- Develop and deliver plans for the reopening Town Square Car Park (high)
- Other options for increasing parking supply (high)

COST -Strategies to Optimise Revenue & Usage

- Town-wide Pricing Strategy to optimise revenue, utilisation, and service quality (medium)
- Income diversification options, including electric vehicle charging options (low)

GETTING MORE SMILING FACES IN PLACES

Getting 'more smiling faces in places' is a seemingly simple objective and a reminder of where work to improve places should be focused. Wrapped-around this ultimate aim are a whole series of choices about priorities and practicalities necessary to chart a pathway to place progress. As People & Places, we can use our experience to assess the priorities and practicalities for your community. We can help you decide if it's best to work on a detail like access and signage or start with the overview by asking stakeholders what matters.

'Place progress can be made by expanding out from a detail, or drilling down from the big picture'



Always happy to help

We are always happy to talk to councils, communities or business groups about how to make progress in places.

Get in touch via services@people-places.net to discuss the best routes to getting 'more smiling faces in places' for your communities and how we may be able to assist. Here's a reminder of the support we can provide:

☐ PURSUING PATHWAYS TO PLACE PROGRESS

- ✓ Planning & delivering revitalised town centres
- ✓ Leading change through a partnership approach

☐ BOOSTING PRIDE IN PLACE

- ✓ Following 10 steps for creating places to be proud of
- ✓ Nurturing people's sense of pride through participation

☐ IMPROVING THE JOURNEY FROM SOFA TO SHOP

- ✓ Improving the appeal & ease of travel to town
- ✓ Linking parking & place through a customer-led process