

# PACE

## Making a Stronger Case for Place

Session One  
Advocating the Case for Place











## The brief

### How can Place Leaders better advocate the case for Place in a period of uncertainty and change?

Place is a complex ecosystem of diverse people and communities, the built environment and geography, economy and technology, and history and culture. It is full of story and heritage and for Place Leaders, the inevitable forward motion that comes from place-shaping for the future. Bringing all these interconnected elements together when designing new schemes and working to national policies and funding streams is a difficult process, but now, with local government facing unprecedented budgetary and political pressures, the need to make a strong case for Place has never been more vital.

The pressure on Place services is intense, with many local councils facing exceptionally difficult decisions. From essential highways maintenance and waste management to housing and planning, and from the implementation of new climate strategies to delivering low traffic neighbourhoods, Place is both under the spotlight and under scrutiny. Place Leaders cannot continue to absorb ongoing cuts to the day to day services used by everyone, but neither are they in competition with other areas. They need to join with partners and advocate for Place and with an upcoming general election and a new government ahead, they need to build their case now.

To advocate effectively, Place Leaders need first to be able to define what Place is, not just for themselves, but for their communities, partners, stakeholders and government. These many interpretations have to be brought together to achieve a commonality, a language and sense of Place that can be understood and shared by all. From there, Place Leaders can build a collective sense of a unified purpose, working with partners who can share messages and advocate for their Places. It is the critical first stage in creating a blueprint for effective advocacy.

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*“The minute you walk out of your front door, you’re in a Place, but the contrasts within Places and across such different environments are phenomenal.”*

**Andy Denman, Highways Sector Director, Amey**

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## Advocating effectively, thinking differently

In this first session of 2024, the cohort of senior and experienced Place Leaders came together to explore the nature of Place and the essential components of advocacy. The session was introduced by Amey's Highways Sector Director, Andy Denman, who set out the context for the day – both the complexities of Place and the vital need for strong advocacy in the current uncertain climate. Expert contributors, Alexandra Paz, Policy Adviser at The British Academy; Mark Rogers, Chief Executive of the Leadership Centre; and Cllr Marianne Overton, Leader of the LGA Independent Group and Vice Chair of the Local Government Association, led three sessions on the relationship between Place and people, policy and advocacy. The group explored how to advocate effectively means requiring us to think differently and more widely about our Places. Conversations drilled down into what we mean by Place, what makes a Place and how we become more inclusive in our understanding of Place and what it means to our communities.

The day was divided into two parts. The morning discussions focused on the nature and meaning of Place with sessions and exercises designed to enable the cohort to step away from their familiar thought patterns and develop new ways of seeing Place. In the afternoon, the group turned their attention to the essentials of advocacy, with workshops focused on examining opportunities and challenges, before developing a clear framework on which to build a stronger case for Place.

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*“One of the oldest tenets of geography is the concept of place. As a result, place has numerous definitions, from the simple “a space or location with meaning” to the more complex “an area having unique physical and human characteristics interconnected with other places.” There are three key components of place: location, locale, and a sense of place. Location is the position of a particular point on the surface of Earth. Locale is the physical setting for relationships between people, such as the South of France or the Smoky Mountains. Finally, a sense of place is the emotions someone attaches to an area based on their experiences. Place can be applied at any scale and does not necessarily have to be fixed in either time or space. Additionally, due to globalisation, place can change over time as its physical setting and cultures are influenced by new ideas or technologies.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/resource-library-concept-place/> accessed 24/02/24



## What is a Place?

### Questions for consideration

- What do you mean by Place?
- What does Place actually mean?
- How could you think differently about your own Place?
- What resonates, what are the strengths and weaknesses?
- In thinking about advocacy, what do you want to do, with whom and by when?
- Do we consider virtual Places in the same way, or differently to physical Places?

All Places are unique and shaped by their geographies, but the human actions that define them fall into the same categories – physical, social and economic. It is when the relationships between each of these elements and the communities that inhabit them is explored that the complexities of each Place are revealed.

### What makes a Place?

The setting for the day's session was the Library of Birmingham. Birmingham is a young, diverse city with a strong identity, many cultures and diverse socio-demographics. The Library is a £188.8m flagship building and the largest cultural space in Europe, opened by Malala Yousafazi in 2013. It lies at the intersection of many ideas of Place, throwing up ideas about who it's for and who it's serving. Malala herself is a symbol of displacement as well as strength and female empowerment, a young woman who is making a new life in the city. The most deprived of Birmingham's communities live close by often working in nearby cafes and bars or cleaning offices, all full of the higher paid. They inhabit different universes in the same space. The area has always been home to the city's poorest communities – their ethnicity is the only changing element – yet the Library of Birmingham was deliberately sited here rather than closer to the University, which had a great deal of support at the time.

It's not only in understanding the history of our Places that we see how the past still shapes the present. The past is still visible in the built environment and the spaces between – what remains and what has been replaced through different eras. It also exists in the changing heritage and culture of the people who live there, the stories they tell themselves and their interactions. Those elements create the feel of a Place and its sense of cohesion and ownership as much as its physical form, demographics or economic performance.

## Who are Places for?

When we think about Place, we often think about a shared narrative but how often do we stop to question who that story belongs to and how it has come to dominate our understanding? Our communities all have different stories about the Places they live which get passed down and become part of a culture. As Place Leaders, do we know these stories that shape our communities' views or just the names of the communities? Could we sculpt our Places better if we knew them? Do we consider the impact of our own perceptions on that civil-civic relationship?

As the cohort dived deeper into these elements, it threw up discussions on the relationships between people and Place, the impacts of culture, heritage and good ancestry – how much should we be looking at shaping our Places for future generations? Unpacking the complex, symbiotic relationship lying in the question – 'are Places for people or are people in Places?' underpinned much of the morning's discussion.

### Points for further reflection:

- Our ancestors projected 50 or 100 years forward, are we doing the same?
- What will other people say about us, and what we did to shape our Places?
- Are Place Leaders 'apprentice ancestors', learning to be the people who will be judged by future generations?

## Considering your place in the world

By simply locating themselves physically in the room, Place Leaders were asked to consider their place in the world. They were asked to think about why they had chosen their position and what made them make that decision.

- "Everyone thinks they are in the centre of the world – it's the human experience."
- "My place in the world is a small and disconnected geography. I'm outside of the world in my bubble world."
- "Professionally, I look at systems and patterns and how things work, I have to have an overview. If I'm on ground level I can only see in front of me, up here, I see more."
- "I like to be outside, to observe so I can take a step back to challenge and potentially change. I'm not comfortable with the centre place. Being removed helps my thinking."



Place leaders were also asked to consider the different lenses that they and others look through when thinking about place-shaping and the complex inter-relationships:

- Different spatial levels – local, regional and national
- Formal constructs – villages, towns, rural, urban and coastal etc
- Citizens, elected members, officers and officials
- A child's journey to adulthood
- Shifting communities of interest and economy
- Community, isolation and self-interest
- Immigration and migration
- Diversity of background, experience, culture and heritage
- Ancestry – place-shaping now for future generations
- Legacy – impact of diverse histories, colonialism and slavery

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*“Thinking about Place is complex and observations come from many different perspectives. What do we bring to the Places that we are invested in but might not actually belong? What does it mean to advocate for Place and what are our messages actually saying?”*

**Mark Rogers, Chief Executive, Leadership Centre**

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## Place and policy

The cohort was invited to consider Place both as a concept and also as a constantly changing, dynamic entity that is multi-levelled and multifaceted: it has physical form, identity and a feel, giving many people a sense of belonging.

Places are determinants of quality of life, health and housing, education and employment, environment and air quality, and so much more. That complex nature can also be a catalyst for effective policymaking by bringing all those diverse and sometimes competing elements together to enable tailored policy and more efficient funding allocation. It allows us to think differently about delivery and be more responsive, weaving together different strands of policy to frame solutions that encompass the interconnectedness of Place.

Covid-19 demonstrated that Place is intrinsic to social outcomes. Structural inequalities became statistically visible and showed that decision-making can be highly dependent on visibility to decision-makers. Gender, ethnicity, disability and age were all impacted differently, which only became more apparent as the pandemic went on. What worked most successfully was the highly targeted, place-based interventions made by local government.

The problems we face in terms of societal inequalities, climate and nature, the built environment and use of resources are most effectively addressed when viewed through this prism of Place. It can connect people, and in times of increased polarisation and the politicisation of our most pressing issues, increase understanding and inspire support.







## Place and advocacy

This is a critical time for local government. The consequences of enduring and ongoing budget cuts are now apparent to the public across all services. Transformation and efficiency programmes have been delivered, cuts that could safely be made have been implemented and there is no fat left to trim. The question for Place Leaders is how, amid the serious pressures on children and adult services, do we make that case for Place?

Influencing depends on relationship. Changing ministers and prime ministers can be disruptive, but it provides a fresh impetus that we can make use of – the opportunity to start again, push consistently and demonstrate what we do – to create a new manifesto every time. With each new administration, we work to reinvent ourselves to meet the latest policy agenda. Each time there are new missions and initiatives and we have to demonstrate enthusiasm and willingness to adjust to those ideas, go forward and build those new connections. But we also have to show our value – we provide critical evidence from ground level up and we can share data, analysis and insight.

Having the data and being across the detail are essential: we have to prove the case, not just make it. We need to know where is the spend, where are the gaps and where's the success and we have to explain how we'll be working and how we see the future. Having that evidence informs the ask and the solution. We have to align with the Minister's vision, but we also have to reach emotions and understand the power of personal story - to better demonstrate outcomes and impact.

We have to influence both national government and residents to work in the same direction. Place Leaders work with partners in every aspect of their role, so we are able to bring people to the table. Those who share the same goals and can amplify key messages are a vital part of a joint effort - they make our arguments more convincing and create a combined, cohesive force. Whether they are partners or residents, that single voice is one of our most effective tools.

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*“When making a case, you need to press all the buttons. You’ve got to be able to connect with the vision, have the data and the solution, but you also need a story - you have to have that emotion.”*

**Cllr Marianne Overton - Leader of the LGA Independent Group and Vice Chair of the Local Government Association**

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### Further questions

- What are the tools we need to succeed and how do we bring partners and residents on board?
- What message does our advocating for Place convey?
- Does being a Place Director mean you're not for people?

## The role of Place Leaders

In their roles, Place Leaders are tasked with working vertically between national government and community as well as developing partnerships horizontally across sectors. The ability to break down silos to create more fluid, diverse and organic governance is both an enormous opportunity and a continual challenge.

### Guidance for further exploration - as Place Leaders advocating for stronger Places, are you thinking about these elements of the role?

- We mediate social and economic problems and relationships
- We weave together issues with solutions
- We are a powerful force connecting people with realities
- We are repositories of knowledge and education on Place, we build relationships with a complex web of people – from politicians to ‘hard to reach’
- We empower and delegate people and Places

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*“There’s no such thing as hard to reach groups, you just haven’t tried hard enough to reach them.”*

**Alexandra Paz, Policy Adviser, The British Academy**

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## Exploring leadership dimensions

The second exercise used the Ketso tool to encourage a reflective exploration of the key dimensions of leadership – ownership, achievement, vision, collaboration and authenticity.

### Question 1: What are some of the challenges you encounter when providing leadership for your Place?

- Ownership – decision-making is dominated by the political cycle.
- Achievement – often overwhelmed by budget and funding questions and having the right resources and skills.
- Vision – affected by complexity when trying to align objectives and priorities.
- Collaboration – managing expectations of partners.
- Authenticity – essential to gain trust in communication and engagement.

### Question 2: What are some of the opportunities and lessons that you can share about being a leader for your Place?

- Important to have a consistent, shared vision – clear, simple and aligned.
- Working in one direction is a key part of leadership – pulling people together and creating alignment is rewarding.
- Creating partnerships with one goal is challenging where there are competing priorities and if people need to sacrifice their own objective.
- Cementing trust is constant work – it is individuals that build relationships often where there is no political steer.
- Successful delivery cultures understand the benefits of stakeholder relationships – it's not a master/servant relationship.
- Critical to ensure there is informed decision making.
- Understand resources, funding and opportunities for commercialisation.
- Important to celebrate and share success.



## Workshops - how can Place Leaders better advocate the case for Place in a period of uncertainty and change?

Dividing into two groups and building on each of the morning sessions and exercises, the cohort were asked to develop a blueprint for better advocacy.

### Workshop 1: Assessing current advocacy

The cohort were asked to consider two questions:

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of how Place Leaders currently advocate Place, locally or in the sector?
6. What are the key reasons that underpin the identified weaknesses?

The group were then asked to review their responses and prioritise what they considered to be the key weaknesses that need to be addressed by Place Leaders.

### What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current advocacy?

<b>Strengths</b>	Allyship	Building alliances with people at all levels.
	Longstanding institutional relationships	Understand who are the rocks in your Place.
	Data and knowledge	Commit to collecting and collating data and analytics, evidence and best practice.
	Authority – peacetime v emergency	There is legitimacy in an emergency. Can you hold that level of authority in peace time?
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Short-termism	Political cycles and funding settlements, transactional behaviours and policy vacuum.
	Lack of trust	Image and reputation of councils among communities.
	We know best attitude	A top-down approach which disconnects and undermines relationship with communities.
	Relying on what's been done before	Can't just scale-up or deploy models because they have been successful elsewhere.
	Lack of shared vision	Siloed behaviours, not sharing resources.



## Workshop 2: Overcoming weaknesses

The group were asked to reflect on their discussions and create proposals on how to address priority weaknesses at a local or sector level.

### Making a stronger case for place

<b>Authority</b>	We have general competence, democratic legitimacy and informal powers.
<b>Clarity of vision and purpose</b>	Create a sense of emergency around what you want to achieve. Generate enough will behind it, tell the right stories, educate people and amplify voices, manage expectations.
<b>Leadership</b>	Don't always need to lead, create alliances and consensus. Build trust through transparency, openness, humility and recognise that a long term approach brings those elements together.
<b>Allies</b>	Be clear on level of engagement and extol benefits of working together long term. Be a go-giver not a go-getter – put your resources at others' disposal, enable them to advocate.
<b>Data and research</b>	Use behavioural insight techniques, turn data into analysis and then insight. Provide clear evidence and understanding.
<b>Build resilience</b>	What do you need to develop greater resilience – from social and environmental value, S106 and supply chains?
<b>Use innovation</b>	Look at ADEPT's Live Labs model - work with academia to create toolkits and best practice.
<b>Culture and attitude</b>	Say yes if, instead of no but. Provide wrap around support for leaders and politicians, de-risk, demonstrate community support and celebrate success.
<b>Be responsive</b>	Listen – get into communities and get out there. Be responsive to what we hear and act on that. Finding advocates and nurture them.
<b>Creativity</b>	Build in the space, budget, skills and training to enable creativity. It takes time and courage but pays off.
<b>The power of story</b>	Use testimonials and lived experiences for storytelling and myth busting. Create multiple layers of engagement.
<b>Create a strong case for Place</b>	Understand opportunities, sectoral strengths and challenges. Build a case that aligns to Place not government strategy, get away from one year funding settlements and four year political cycles.
<b>Make the case</b>	Be clear on benefits you want to realise. Use evidence to build a compelling narrative, use emotion and story.

## Reflections

### How do you advocate the case the case for Place through uncertainty and change?

- People are your Place
- Consistency of vision
- Flex - always
- Evidence base – what is your data and insights?
- Demonstrate challenge and success
- Allyship and partnership – who do you need to have and how do you nurture relationships?
- Who has the power behind them to help you make it happen?
- How do you perceive your role – what are your new job specs?
- How do you persuade senior leadership to take a step out?

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*“Advocate is an interesting word. It is active rather than passive, and its definition is to build a case. Because we are here for the long term, Place Leaders are the mitigating factor to national uncertainty. We can advocate for our Places and people and demonstrate why it is important.”*

**Neil Gibson, PACE Facilitator**

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