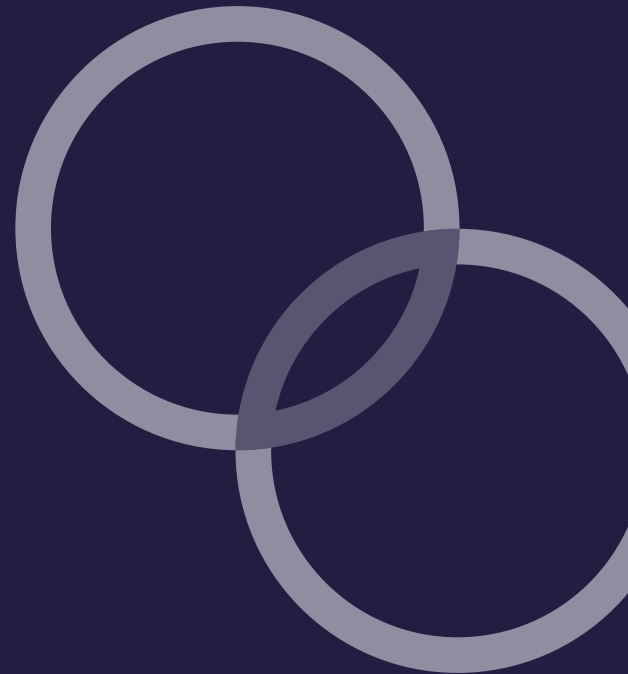


ADEPT  Amey

PACE 

Session Summaries



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— 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.

“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

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.

“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.”¹

¹ <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

“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

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.

The British Academy has set out how a place-sensitive policy-approach, one that is inclusive, adaptive, forward looking and integrated, is vital. It has developed a framework for catalysing sustainable Places that identifies five critical elements that can also be considered when developing a blueprint for advocacy: ²

A framework for catalysing sustainability places

Place-sensitivity requires policy approaches that are:

1. Inclusive
2. Adaptive
3. Forward Looking
4. Integrated



The question for the cohort was how can they use their position and knowledge of local communities to further the case for Place, are they reaching far enough into their communities to build trust and gain support for their policies?

“Sensitive governance is vitally important. Having a diversity of voices, appropriate training and breaking down horizontal and vertical silos is essential and it requires work within and across, between different levels of governance and different policies.”

Alexandra Paz, Policy Adviser, The British Academy

² Understanding the role of place in environmental sustainability. British Academy, 2023: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/understanding-the-role-of-place-in-environmental-sustainability/> Accessed 24/02/2204



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.

“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

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

“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



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?

Strengths	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?
Weaknesses	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

Authority	We have general competence, democratic legitimacy and informal powers.
Clarity of vision and purpose	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.
Leadership	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.
Allies	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.
Data and research	Use behavioural insight techniques, turn data into analysis and then insight. Provide clear evidence and understanding.
Build resilience	What do you need to develop greater resilience – from social and environmental value, S106 and supply chains?
Use innovation	Look at ADEPT's Live Labs model - work with academia to create toolkits and best practice.
Culture and attitude	Say yes if, instead of no but. Provide wrap around support for leaders and politicians, de-risk, demonstrate community support and celebrate success.
Be responsive	Listen – get into communities and get out there. Be responsive to what we hear and act on that. Finding advocates and nurture them.
Creativity	Build in the space, budget, skills and training to enable creativity. It takes time and courage but pays off.
The power of story	Use testimonials and lived experiences for storytelling and myth busting. Create multiple layers of engagement.
Create a strong case for Place	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.
Make the case	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?

“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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Making a Stronger Case for Place

Session Two
Planning for Stronger Places





How can Place Leaders plan for stronger Places in a period of uncertainty and change?

After considering how to build advocacy for Place in session one, a key theme emerged around storytelling, specifically how we harness the extraordinary power of creating and driving strong narratives which resonate with people. Stories cut through – they enable an audience to focus and remember those speakers who share personal details and their individual story. It is often the case that no amount of eloquence can rival the power of a compelling narrative.

During the session, senior Place Leaders explored how colleagues had used narratives to support the successful development of policies and services, often overcoming challenges. Some stories are told against a difficult backdrop, but grit is an essential part of a successful story.

Discussions with Sarah Norman, Chief Executive of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, and Ivan Browne, Professor of Public Health and Wider Determinants of Health at De Montfort University, provided opportunities to debate and reflect on their experiences and use of narrative to rejuvenate and safeguard their Places.

Storytelling techniques and structures were explored by Dawn Reeves in a session on Place-based storytelling and narrative, which emphasised the central importance of the 'why' in building a successful story.



Brian Andreas, The Story People (2024)

"If you want a message to land you have to say it eight times: but actually if your message is contained in a good story you only have to say it once."

Andy Denman, Highways Sector Director, Amey

Telling stories throughout time

In the second part of the day, the group examined the strengths and weaknesses of how Place Leaders currently plan for Places, identify opportunities to make changes and overcome adversity.

The setting was the People's History Museum in Manchester. The museum tells the story of the development of democracy in Britain, and how people have come together at different times and in different places to fight for a fairer world.

“Can you really plan for Place without planning for people simultaneously? Is it about the cycle lanes or the people who are riding the bikes?”

Neil Gibson, PACE Facilitator

Even before the general election was called, Place Leaders were constructing new narratives against a backdrop of uncertainty and change, with shifting policies and budgetary pressures impacting on decision making, the development of vision and thought leadership. With a new Government in place, the challenge of planning for stronger Places remains as vivid and urgent as ever.





The importance of better conversations about Place; listening and hearing

During the pandemic, national leaders were often telling local leaders what to do: at the local level, leaders had to assess whether those policies would work in their Place. But Place can be a challenging concept, it can feel fickle and elusive – even when you think you’ve got hold of it, it turns into something else. This is true even when your relationship with a Place is deep and set within a powerful narrative.

“I was Director of Public Health in Leicester – I was born there, it’s a place I felt at home. My Mum was a Windrush nurse, worked for the NHS for 40 years. My Dad was a builder...he worked on the university and when he was cold on the roof he would tell himself the only thing keeping me warm is the thought that one of my children will study here...I actually went to Derby, then Birmingham – however I think they’re going to make me an honorary doctor of science there this year, so he got what he wanted in the end.”

Ivan Browne, Professor of Public Health and Wider Determinants of Health, De Montfort University

Those relationships with a Place put you in a strong position. But this knowledge has to remain fluid, and the changes which are taking place under the surface can be hard to spot, even when you know a Place very well.



How can we really understand a community so we can build infrastructure which really works for that community?

In Leicester during the pandemic, being purposeful about community engagement was part of the answer. Can Place leaders become better at having those conversations, and better at understanding how dynamic the changes are? Cities and Places are changing and becoming more diverse, but we still have structures in place that were built and maintained from 1991 onward. As Directors, how do you learn to listen, and how do you hear and translate that into action which changes the experience for people?

We are all working with limited resources, so every penny we spend must be meaningful – we need to hear what our communities need. Place is dynamic, and often self-determined: it can give us the insight to measure the impact we have.

Case Study - Understanding the people in your Place

Through the pandemic, authorities had to decide where vaccine centres should be located. NHS leaders in Leicester thought they had picked locations carefully – but it became clear people were not visiting one centre and this was affecting vaccination rates. The preconceived reason for this was vaccine hesitancy, but in conversation with Somali community leaders it became clear the underlying problem was one of Place. It was a matter of the vaccine centre being 500 metres across a road, putting it somewhere the community would not naturally visit or feel safe.

Moving the vaccination centre to a mosque changed that: a community which had been wrongly perceived to be vaccine hesitant ended up with good vaccination rates. Another unexpected and positive outcome was that the white working-class community also came to the mosque in good numbers: it was their Place too. This highlighted the city had changed – the original narrative was out-of-date. The NHS was learning about local Places and communities, and understanding how dynamic and changing they are.



Telling stories to make Barnsley the place of possibilities

Storytelling has been part of the way the Council at Barnsley has provided leadership as it emerged from a difficult period in its history, to write a new narrative for its communities.

Recognition of its narrative came through being awarded both the MJ Awards Local Authority of the Year and the LGC Awards Council of the Year in 2023 – the first time in history that has happened.

“Having emerged from the industrial past that left a generational legacy, the council has utterly transformed every aspect of its Place. Its determination to create a Place of Possibilities has engendered community pride, opportunity and hope. It is a story of success with further chapters to be written which can inspire others to do even more and is more than a worthy winner of the MJ Local Authority of the Year Award.”

Citation, MJ Awards

Barnsley’s story was once defined by coal, which dominated the economy until the end of the last century. Perhaps nowhere else was as badly hit by the miners’ strike and the pit closures: almost every ward has a memorial to miners who died in accidents.

A new narrative emerged, centred on the need to find a new economic purpose. Job creation in Barnsley is above the regional and national average, with an ambitious local plan and the creation of an ecosystem of digital businesses. The transformation of the town centre saw footfall become higher than before the pandemic, with an NHS diagnostic centre right at its heart, showing that people will come to the right things in the right places. The changes were challenging, such as releasing greenfield sites for development due to very little industrial land in the borough, but they have moved Barnsley forward.

“One of the things my leader will say is that everybody wants things to improve, but nobody wants things to change.”

**Sarah Norman, Chief Executive,
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council**



Barnsley had to be bold and brave, and this comes with the risk of being laughed at. Working with architect, Will Alsop, to plan the new town centre, he proposed the idea of modelling it on a Tuscan hill town. The story appeared in the Guardian on 1st April, and some thought it was an April fool joke. But now the town centre is aligned with that vision: tightly bounded and highly successful.

Engaging with communities requires confidence and ensuring that confidence is extended across the wider authority team. The approach can be purposeful by experiencing different parts of the community – using public transport, eating in local restaurants or spending time with local schools. Taking the time to reflect on these experiences can make a difference to how the whole Place team connects with communities.



Points for further reflection

How do we bring the voice of young people into the storytelling narrative?

Young people should be offered the chance to feel a sense of pride in their Place. Losing that pride is damaging – it leads to a feeling more successful young people will move away. The sources of pride can be diverse, so think deep and don't limit them. In Leicester, it might be the football team returning to the Premier League, while Barnsley has one of the best youth choirs in the world.

Should leaders make it personal to help land the overall message?

Leaders who share some of the personal details of their lives can be easier to relate to, and this can be important for getting your audience to accept the narrative being offered. Putting yourself out there is bold and can be risky. People may tell you how you are doing, but they may also forgive you when you make a mistake because they understand you care.

How do we build trust in our narrative when so many of our communities feel they have been left behind?

Take the time to craft the right narrative for the community and be honest about the difficult decisions that have been made. People are very ready to call things out now: the issue of trust is at the heart of all kinds of public services. As leaders, we can prove to our audience that we are human beings – talk about our own stories and lives and build relationships, friendships, trust and transparency on a local level. It's positive there are more conversations happening about trust, and perhaps they should have happened earlier, but the momentum will only continue to grow.

"We've got to think about growing trust and putting it firmly on the agenda: the best time to plant a tree was a 100 years ago, the next best time is now."

Ivan Browne



Creating and telling stories to change perceptions and perspectives

Storytelling is changing the way people see local government. From old narratives around corruption and ‘town hall fat cats’ to what we actually see: good people trying to do the right thing in difficult circumstances. The stories we tell ourselves and others makes a difference to how people think, feel and act.

We need to be telling stories which celebrate the central purpose of local government, which has not changed that much. As W Eric Jackson put in his 1945 book Local Government in England and Wales, “councils do a fine and necessary job...without it no civilised country can carry on or call itself civilised”.

What we notice about successful stories is they are personal, optimistic and connect with the audience – structured around the Why, the How and the What. But the Why is at the centre.

As leaders, we must be comfortable with emotional stories, we’re always trying to go from the individual to the universal. Local government tells a whole system story. It doesn’t necessarily come to a definitive end, because it reflects work which is ongoing and continuous.

There is never just one story, stories are connected and often contested. But leaders are seeking to treat stories as strategy, so they are always looking at the underlying narrative. For example, the film Jaws has a narrative which says sharks are dangerous, but the deeper narrative is our fear of the unknown and the other – nature taking a form we can’t control.



Simon Sinek Golden Circle

“Stories don’t have to be true to be powerful.”

Dawn Reeves



Narratives are messy and leaders can change them. Campaigners fighting for equal marriage in the US did this when they went from a position of calling for equal rights to 'love is love'. Shifting the narrative to one focused on love got people behind them and enabled them to make a change. Narratives are messy and not fixed; Barnsley does not need to be a forever story about a mining town unless it wants to be.

Sometimes the dominant Place narrative is very negative, but in shaping an alternative you don't need to replace the old one. There should always be grit and there should always be hope. If you don't have grit, it won't be authentic. Stories have weaknesses to overcome, alongside the hope for what could be.

How to change a negative or unhelpful narrative

1. Is it true?
2. Can you know it is absolutely true?
3. How do you react when you have that negative thought
4. What could your Place – or your organisation – be like without that negative thought?

A story will be true for some audiences, but not others. A Place might have its challenges, but some people would not want to live anywhere else. Places sometimes need 'deprivation stories' to get support, but they also need stories of hope, so they can have more than one narrative simultaneously. We make choices about which story we tell, because stories are not absolutely true for everyone. We can decide to acknowledge one story but choose to tell another one. When dealing with a negative story, lean into it: but Place leaders should tell a different story.

Stories are made up of many voices and need to appeal to different audiences. When creating your Place story, think about ideas, facts, practical, and the heart. All of these aspects are needed to appeal to different audiences and not lose the people you intended to reach with your story.

Somerset as an example of a Place story:

Somerset's story celebrates the county's unique environment, landscape and sense of community. It brings together a sense of Somerset's history while exploring its ambitions for the future. It is very specific to the county and could not be any other Place.

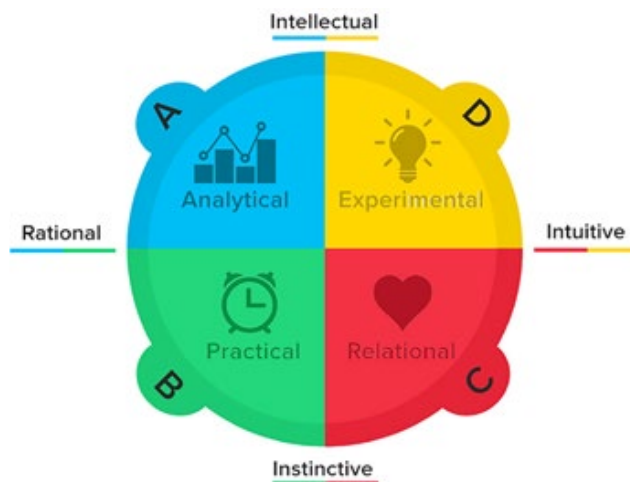
Appealing to different audiences

We tend to communicate with others based on our own thinking preference.

A wholebrain story appeals to audiences regardless of natural thinking preferences.

Yellow = ideas **Blue = facts**

Green = practical **Red = heart**



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Our starter for ten narrative - All the people of Somerset

All the people of Somerset - Sumorsaete ealle, as our motto says - make this historic, creative and beautiful county special.

Ours is a place of distinctive communities, market towns and rural villages, shaped by a proud heritage and unique geographies. From great sites like **Wells, Exmoor and the Cheddar Gorge to the Sweet Track - one of the world's oldest roads** - every beautiful winding country road, rolling hill, coastal and wetland area is a reminder of the **importance of nature to us and our way of life**.

At heart there's a common core to Somerset: **friendly, peaceful, with a strong sense of community**.

You see our spirit in the **carnivals that take place all over Somerset**. In the winter, they **bring light into the short days and long nights**. **Glastonbury Festival** - the most famous and joyful music festival in the world - could only happen here. **Music, craft and a rich diverse cultural life are catalysts for growth and bring people together**, keeping us inspired, healthy and active.

The challenge of planning for the future comes with the **responsibility for protecting Somerset's precious, but fragile, environment**. The Romans first began to reclaim the extraordinary Somerset Levels from the sea. Now the threats of flooding mean **protecting our stunning landscapes** from climate change is urgent.

A green future is our reality. Our reputation for innovation in areas like low carbon technology and energy means new investment, **like 4,000 quality jobs at the Gravity site** - but not at the **expense of our environment**.

We want to **lead the South-West in building a green regional economy, using our excellent location, growing supply chains and generating sustainable employment** that fits with **our values**.

It's right to **be ambitious, all the people of Somerset deserve the best**. We see our **market towns growing** as vibrant places where **young families can settle**.

Children will **get the best possible start in life and training will be linked to work in a range of thriving local businesses**. We know **we need to do more to connect people** across this large county to the jobs, homes and opportunities that will see Somerset flourish. We will always work hard to support **people who need more help. It's in our DNA**.

Our county of big skies, special places and unique history is treasured by every generation. The stories we tell about Somerset have people at their heart - facing the future with a sense of **belonging, determination and pride**.



Workshops – how can Place Leaders plan for stronger Places 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 delve into how Places were currently planned for and what could be changed to create a new narrative.

Workshop 1: Assessing the current backdrop

Place Leaders

- Work with a creative vision and have effective frameworks to draw upon.
- Understand all the relevant connections and draw on strengths relating to their access to data and evidence, the ability to consult effectively, to work with partners and their knowledge of communities.
- Move an idea from inception to delivery, navigating the planning system and understanding business cases and contracts.
- See the long-term, looking ahead to be visionary and think about how things can be better.

The planning system

- Can be a weakness, with local plans often at different stages which makes master planning too slow and done in pockets when opportunity presents itself. Local plans take five years and are sometimes out-of-date by the time they are adopted.
- Has a history of professional silos and potential mismatches between plans and the resources available.
- Can create solutions which are too often top-down rather than consultative with communities working with them rather than doing something to them.

Wider capabilities

- There can be a lack of political coherence, and the short termism of the political cycle can work against effective planning. Systems of governance can drive risk aversion, sometimes in ways which do not drive innovation or pace.
- The people responsible for community engagement sometimes have the technical expertise, but not the particular set of skills they need to engage successfully.
- Place planning is becoming increasingly complex, for example, energy is now a top issue for Place, meaning Place Leaders have to expand their knowledge base.



Workshop 2: Creating proposals to change the current backdrop

- Politics is a key driver, and resources and resourcefulness must be linked to politics. Directors need to be very clear about the assets and deficits which are in a Place.
- Place leaders have a unique position to balance long-term and short-term needs, break down complex problems into manageable parts and develop the right narrative for their communities and Places.
- The 'who' is always the stakeholders and the community. Need to work with the community as a co-production, not selling an idea but having the humility to work with people from across the community.
- Be more opportunistic when the backdrop allows – get on with doing things rather than over planning and not delivering.
- Exploit Place's strength to look ahead and tackle big, complex challenges, by building stronger narratives that drive change and engender support.
- Maximise the strength of strategic planning by ensuring strategic plans contain enough flexibility to reflect big economic and demographic changes. Working in partnership with developers, central government and other councils can address this and provide visibility and flexibility.
- Review the process for creating Local Plans to identify smarter ways of working, such as using technology to develop plans in parallel rather than being a long drawn out linear process.

Understand the Place and the people to create stories that flourish

Place Leaders have an unenviable role to make sure infrastructure is representing the real needs of communities. There is a difference between knowing what they need and thinking we know what they need – better conversations are key: listening, hearing and enacting to remove the conflict between institutionalised structures of Place and the actual needs of Place.

Councils can make statements of vision and take people with them by building a sense of pride. Leaders must be bold and brave and go out on a limb if they believe it's the right thing for their Place. Finessing narratives to work with various audiences, co-producing with partners and selling it to local people, communities and Places for the benefit of all.

“A strong narrative helps people hold their nerve during a period of change.”

Neil Gibson, PACE Facilitator

Points for further reflection

- Place leaders need to remember the importance of being brave and bold. Sometimes introducing a narrative means going out on a limb.
- Place Leaders have the power to develop narratives and embed them in the Place system. This takes time but with authenticity, honesty and grit, they have the power to influence audiences and change communities.
- Listening and hearing your audience helps to create your story but offers wider benefits to truly understand the Place and communities.
- Listening can be challenging but prevents producing a narrative which is only reminiscent of a glossy brochure.
- Narratives and stories need a custodian to ensure there is no loss of momentum and the ultimate goal of improving a Place is achieved.





— *PACE* →

Facilitating Investment to Create Stronger Places

Session Three
A Nuneaton Masterclass







How can Place Leaders facilitate investment that creates stronger Places in a period of uncertainty and change?

For the third session, our Place Leaders were asked to draw upon the learning and experiences of the sessions to date and apply this learning to Nuneaton. Following the election and change of government earlier in the year, the brief of 'uncertainty and change' certainly applies to the political landscape we find ourselves sat within. The local council leaders of Nuneaton have risen to this challenge, as they have advocated for change within Nuneaton and have pushed for momentum behind the 'Transforming Nuneaton' agenda.

To complete our series of sessions for the ADEPT and Amey PACE programme, the final session centred on facilitating investment to create stronger Places in a period of uncertainty and change. Investment was selected as the third topic by the cohort. The cohort recognised investment comes in all forms and was linked to the reality of previous sessions surrounding how to make the Place story created, into a reality.

"Town centres are organic things; they are a series of functions and interactions between people and assets. They are also really complex systems and delivering those tipping points and triggering those virtuous circles are important for us to understand."

Danny Gilbert, Strategy Director, Amey

Harnessing the capacity of local communities to invest in making their local places stronger

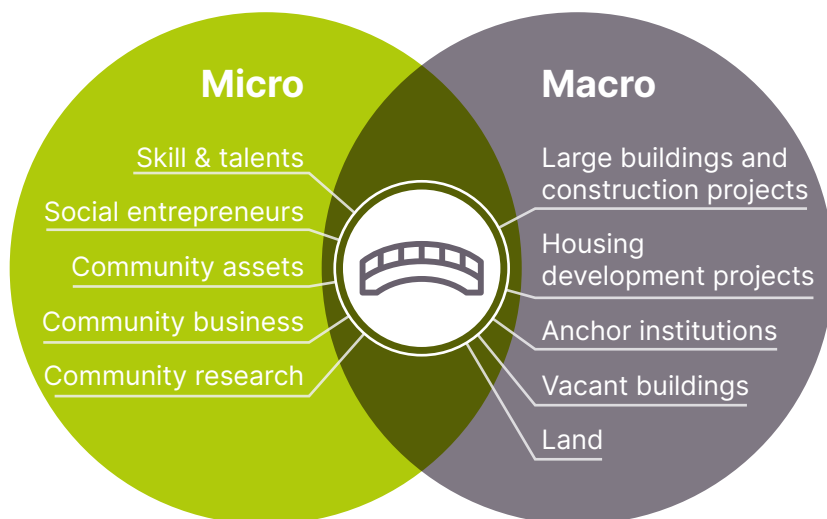
As Place Leaders it's important to recognise the sheer, and in some cases untapped, power of utilising the capacity and capability within your communities to help shape your Places. This is a multi-million resource at your disposal, that can either fight you and slow you down or could be part of the solution. Karolina Medwecka, East Birmingham Programme Development Manager shared her experience of successfully mobilising this community capacity and energy into positive forces to shape the place of Birmingham.

Case Study: Unlocking social and economic capital to regenerate our cities

Birmingham was not unique in its challenges. It wasn't just section 114 and the cost-of-living crisis that made gaining capital investment challenging, it was the narrative and the logic of capital. Although Birmingham itself had long undergone a series of development in the city centre, there was still a desire to see meaningful changes in the areas considered most deprived, with sky rocketing figures of food bank users and benefit claims.

To challenge the ever-easy doom and gloom narrative in 2017 the council sought external funding from the EU, securing £3m through the Urban Initiative Funding, which blended capital and revenue funding together. This created the opportunity for the city to maximise the blend of capital and revenue funds centered on a masterplan approach for the city.

The masterplan for the city, at the time, was ambitious and, like most councils, many promises had been made to the residents. In reality, there was limited revenue to invest in the master plan and it solely centred on the delivery of new housing and a new hospital. To challenge their narrative, Birmingham City Council (BCC) invested the Urban Initiative Funding into the master plan to achieve the spirit of a single regeneration project. Their internal challenge was to build cohesion between the Micro assets within the local community, that already existed but were not used, with the Macro assets the council had control over.





Embedding the USE-IT methodology

BCC took the bold decision to invest in the bridge, in connecting the Micro and the Macro, connecting the language and the logic to make this work. BCC brought together 16 organisations into a partnership consisting of the Council, the hospital, the two major universities, chamber of commerce, private sector and tapped into the SMEs, Social Enterprises and Third Sector organisations.

To provide a connector from the project to the communities BCC recruited over 80 Community Researchers. These were individuals living within the community, who with the University of Birmingham, provided training on research methods, interviewing, transcribing interviews and formulating research questions. The community researchers were released out in to the community to really delve in to the lives of those individuals living within Birmingham, local businesses who would be seeking opportunity through the development and to empower the local communities to lead in identifying the regeneration they would like to see.

This initiative saw many successes:

Success Area	Initial Outcome	Long-term Outcome
Employment	BCC tripled targets on unlocking local skills, with over 500 individuals matched to the NHS jobs schemes. BCC worked in collaboration with NHS to modify their entry requirements to unlock the sheer potential for people in the city with overseas medical qualifications.	Following their success, this system change has been replicated within the NHS and other NHS Trusts to replicate the change and unlock transformational change.
Business support	Over three years, a network of 120 Social Enterprises and five consortiums were formed. The health care consortium tripled their income throughout the pandemic, successfully pivoting from face-to-face meets to digital engagement.	The success of the support and network has established Birmingham as a Social Enterprise City.
Social capital	Communities were empowered to lead on regeneration plans that would affect their assets. Changing the narrative from transactional to transformative support, to facilitate and support local communities in developing their own plans, (church turned into co-working space, food bank turned into a pantry).	Edgbaston reservoir has been transformed from a place of anti-social and unlawful behaviour to a valued asset within the community. A community co-designed facility for festivals, mothers and children's groups and runners' groups.
Moving beyond public consultations	The 85 community researchers trained by the BCC, have become long-term treasures to the council. They now co-design research projects with the council.	Community research is now a vital method for the city to engage and consult

Return on Investment

BCC has seen an outstanding and vast success with implementing the USE-IT approach within the city. From the initial £3m Urban Initiative Funding, a return on investment of over £25m was achieved. This has been calculated based on direct investment from the private sector following the work completed and the savings to the public sector, with the savings in benefits and recruitment costs to the NHS.

Critical to this success of the USE-IT! model was the change in the language. Flipping the narrative from a negative where the public sector is there to save those most in need, to a positive where those around are empowered to work with you.

Top 10 tips for the transfer of USE-IT

1. Identify the right neighbourhood of focus
2. Identify the right stakeholders and ensure political and strategic buy-in
3. Link to wider strategy and policy
4. Map both Macro and Micro assets
5. Develop a platform to work with residents – community research/grants
6. Develop a Community Economic Development Plan
7. Attract a blend of funding and take your time
8. Deliver activities
9. Evaluate and monitor the impact of activities
10. Continuously embed into mainstream policy and practice



Optimising the potential of long-term private sector investment to create stronger places

In stark contrast to the community power shared with our cohort, the private sector provides a strong and powerful offering to the Place Leaders of today. Investors are interesting creatures who can offer considerable investment, in many cases sitting behind developers, and help create stronger places through taking a longer-term perspective - seeing Places as investment opportunities.

What is an institutional investor?

All institutional investment is the aggregation of lots of peoples' money into a platform for onward investment. Common examples of an institutional investor include a Pension provider or an insurance company. Institutional investors are also big endowments, such as a US university or a national endowment like the Welcomes Trust. When Place Leaders ask for an institutional investment, they are asking for an aggregated vehicle to invest in their place and it is important to feel free and empowered to challenge what providers mean, when they say they can offer an institutional investment.

What is not institutional investment?

Corporate investors | These are companies, and they will show up in places as house builders or registered housing providers and mixed-use big scale developers. Corporate investors are vertically integrated and they will take institutional investment money, as equity and borrow debt off the capital markets, to deploy it through their corporate structure.

Family offices | These are individuals who do exceedingly well in life, set up trusts and hire small teams to invest their money for them. These are prolific across the world, with thousands to be found locally. It is common to see quite a lot of family offices, taking a high risk in Place as they will fund entrepreneurial interventions within a Place. They typically make quick decisions and are happy to take on high risk investments. However, they may not work to the quality or social standards Place Leaders want.

Retail and small businesses | These are thousands of individuals who invest in their Place every day. This could be recognised through small improvements such as an updated store front or a new garden. Collectively they invest a huge amount of money but this money transfers through a private channel. These individuals are a collective loophole in a Place's regeneration strategy, but most commonly we as Place Leaders have lost the ability to connect with them.



How does institutional investment show up to a Place Leader?

Often, and increasingly, institutional investment representatives will directly engage with Place Leaders to ask about the projects you have and offer advice on how their institutional money can be invested to help you.

However institutional investment money also arrives in front of Place Leaders in the form of Developers. Due to economic changes, Developers have changed their approach and will support the development of a project until it is in a sellable position. Corporate investors are equally often investing institutional investment money when engaging with Place Leaders.

The landscape has changed for Place Leaders. Ten-years ago, Place Leaders would deal with developers who would identify a site, steer the planning process, build the asset they wanted to build and then maybe sell it into the market. This traditional model is near-extinct and more commonly Place Leaders will see a development manager. These Managers have just enough money to buy a site, just enough money to go to planning and they will then sell the opportunity in the market. This causes greater fragmentation between the people who have identified the need for the project and those who are trying to fund it.

A difference in interests

Place Leaders are focused on the numbers and return on investments because they have limited funds and need to consider the best way to spend, but they have to balance this with creating and selling the narrative. Possibly the challenge is they create one version of the narrative but don't adapt it for their different audiences i.e. the community narrative won't work for investors, but if they tweaked the community narrative to focus on the financial return, it would appeal more to investors. However, this takes time to create a compelling narrative and iterative versions for every stakeholder.

House builders | These are vertically integrated; they take money from the stock market and need to demonstrate their stock price. They want to minimise the amount of equity they invest in to a project for as short of a duration as they can.

Developers | Those developers who are left, who have their own capital, they need to see the growth on completion if they are committing to a project. They want to see continued growth thereafter through rental rates and yield compression. They will not have strict restrictions on how this is deployed.

Development managers | The growing element to the sector. The development manager's aim is to drive and fund a project to point where the project is in an attractive position to sell. They want to invest the least amount of money as far down the line as possible and then use an agent to source institutional investment money to achieve the green light on building the project.

Registered providers | Are people that will stay with you. If they can be convinced to not only provide your social housing, but also to provide some affordable housing, rent-to-buy, market rental and market sale, they will anchor your places.

Questions to ask future investors:

- What is the ultimate funding source?
- What risks will you tolerate?
- How long is your investment horizon?
- How do you measure your returns?
- What milestones matter to you?





Case study: A Masterclass on 'Transforming Nuneaton'.

At the heart of the 'Transforming Nuneaton' 15-year masterplan is the appetite to breathe life in to and regenerate the Nuneaton town centre, as explained by Mark Ryder, Executive Director for Communities; Catherine Marks, Service Manager: Regeneration & Place Shaping Communities; Steve Smith, Director for Infrastructure & Climate Change and Stuart Buckley, Managing Director of Warwickshire Property Development Group.

The 'Transforming Nuneaton' partnership programme was formally established five-years ago, after Warwickshire County Council and Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, recognised the urgent need to do something quite radical to Nuneaton town centre, due to the socio-economic indicators. The ex-coal mining town was significantly impacted by the closure of the mines in the 80s and the demise of the manufacturing industry, and the Councils have long fought for a severe intervention to enliven the entire town centre.

Through a suite of projects that, together, will provide Nuneaton with the economic boost it needs and help it become a strong hub for its community. The investment in the town centre will be sought to improve:

- Leisure and business opportunities
- Education and skills
- Unlocking housing development
- Rail, highway and cycle infrastructure.

This will support economic growth within the borough and wider area whilst ensuring the town helps reduce its impact on climate change.

The vision:

'Transforming Nuneaton' has been in the pipeline for the last 12 – 15 years, worked on tirelessly by a dedicated team who are devoted to making the necessary changes the town centre needs. An initial master plan from many years ago was used as a starting point and has been evolved through fresh eyes and minds to assess how they could make it realistic and deliverable. The first step was to look at what assets the councils owned between them, the land and the highways infrastructure.

The challenges

The challenges facing Nuneaton as a town centre destination were identified:

- **Heavily reliant on retail** | As retail trends have changed the town centre has suffered. Pre-pandemic, the town centre was already struggling but post-Covid it has sped up how the town centre has been used and how it is perceived.
- **Public perception** | One of the biggest challenges has been the public defining what the town centre should be. Public perception has not caught up with the market, retail won't come back to what it was, however the public would still like to see the big department stores that were in the town 20 years ago.
- **Areas of deprivation** | In Nuneaton alone there are 60 localised areas of deprivation. GVA (Gross Value Added) per head is £15,830, compared to the national average £25,601. This is much lower along with job density at 0.6, whereas the national average is 0.87.
- **Standard town centre issues** | The town is retail-led with a dispersed offer; two shopping centres, fully pedestrianised; bound by the ring road providing restrictions for room to grow; very limited residential and leisure offer; poor links to train station.

"This is what drove the work and development of the Transforming Nuneaton programme, we needed to do something, we had to intervene and as Local Authorities we had the gift to do that and the tools at our disposals which we could use to help make the change we wanted to see."

Catherine Marks, Service Manager: Regeneration & Place Shaping Communities, Warwickshire County Council

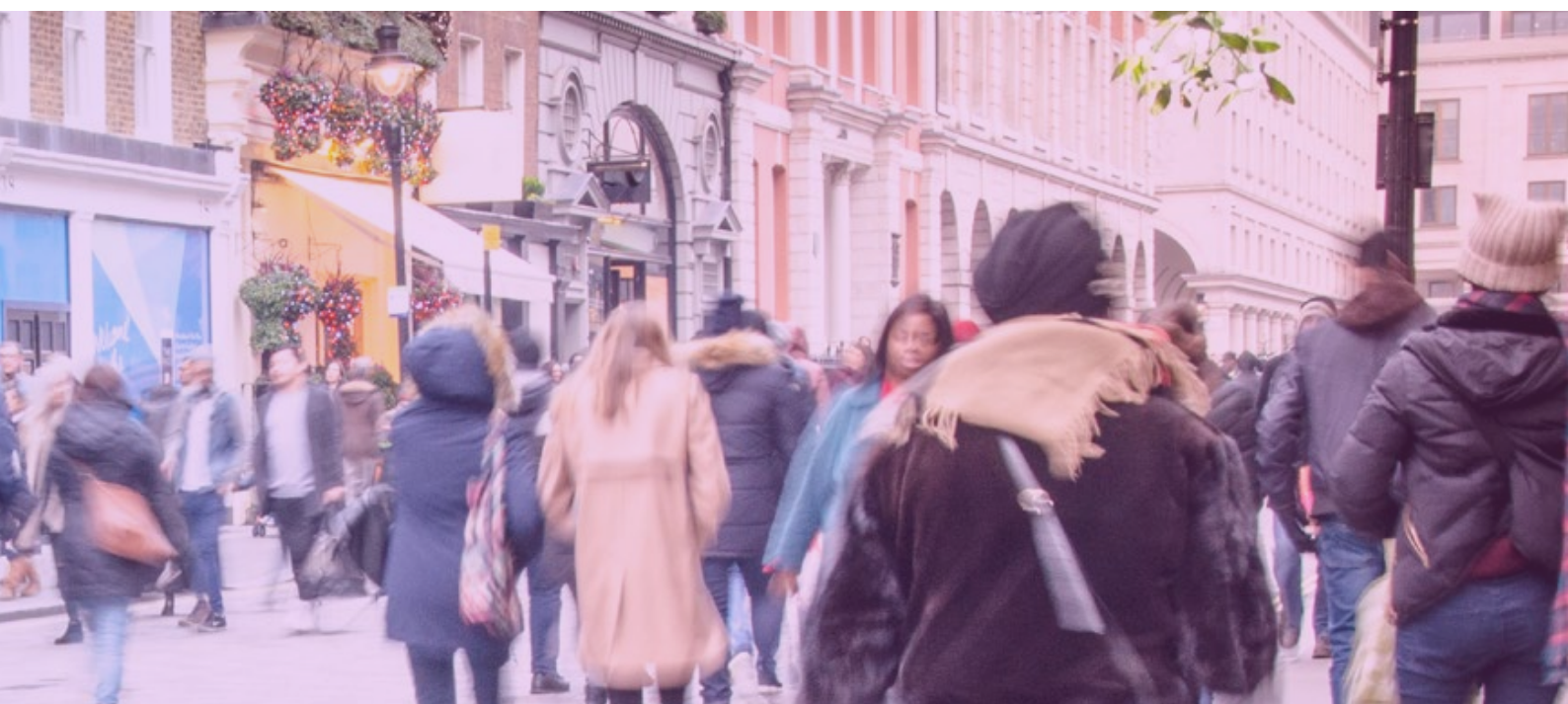




The opportunities

Significant opportunities were identified within Nuneaton town centre:

- Large catchment area of people | 125,000 residents live within the traditional market town, and these are currently being lost to the likes of Coventry, Hinkley and Tamworth. With a regenerated town centre these individuals could be attracted back to invest in their local economy.
- Large footprint | It's a large town centre with lots of space and buildings owned by Warwickshire County Council and Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough council.
- Strategic location | The Northern area of the town has seen significant growth in terms of housing and employment. The town is well located next to the M6 and A5, with strategic rail links to Birmingham and London providing an attractive opportunity to businesses.
- Fill in the gaps | Currently the town centre does not have a leisure economy. However, this provides a fantastic opportunity to create an evening economy through restaurants, cinema and further ideas to diversify the offer.
- Businesses and business use | With a limited office supply and minimal recent commercial investment - the last development was the Justice Centre built 15 years ago - there is opportunity to encourage businesses to the area to invest in jobs and skills, and the potential for private finance.
- Develop the visitor economy | Grow the appeal and embrace the history of Nuneaton through George Eliot, museum and art gallery, library, Abbey Theatre and Larry Grayson.



The programme of works

A series of interventions have been identified across the 15-year masterplan:

- Vicarage Street development | The site is in sole ownership of the local authorities who have a desire to see a mixed-use development potentially including residential and office, supporting its key anchor building - a new state-of-the-art Library and Business Centre.
- Grayson Place development | Abbey Street looks to grow and enhance the existing leisure offer in the town and bring forward a new hotel, leisure uses, food and beverage outlets and some residential accommodation.
- Highways infrastructure | The Transforming Nuneaton (Ring Road Highway Improvements) Programme is a suite of projects that, together, will support development to Nuneaton town centre and the wider borough.
- Bridge to Living | An exciting mixed-use development opportunity coming soon, including 120 residential units which will introduce terraced urban housing and attract a new demographic within the town centre.

“It’s being able to tell the story. Transforming Nuneaton isn’t a single scheme. It’s a series of interventions across two bookends, that will start to transform the town centre.”

Stuart Buckley, Managing Director of Warwickshire Property Development Group.



The programme of action

Local Authority leaders have adapted and transformed their Masterplan to ensure 'Transforming Nuneaton' is viable:

- Acquiring assets | Thirteen-years ago the Councils went to market to find a developer for the Vicarage Street development. After a promising start the market fell, and the deal stopped. The Councils identified all schemes they had proposed centred around one centrepiece building and took the decision to use the Local Growth Fund LEP to purchase the building, which is now due to be demolished in the next six-months.
- Moving away from the private investors to self-investment | Nuneaton itself faces an issue with low land values and therefore there has been low appetite from private investors. All historical schemes have struggled to get over the line, hence the need for Council and grant intervention. Four-years ago Warwickshire County Council, launched the Warwickshire Property Development Group. A critical asset as they provide the unique opportunity for the in-house capability of working the commercial and residential plans with a lower margin than other developers.
- Diversifying the residential offer | With only 15 residents living within the ring road, Nuneaton doesn't have an established residential market. With 120 residential units planned as part of the Masterplan, the idea was to introduce terraced urban housing to attract a new demographic within the town centre. The townhouse style development is viable and can be built with a small return, which complements the wider offer.
- Gaining attraction through sequencing | The Masterplan has been sequenced with the view that the development of the new College and the expected expansion of the leisure offering first, will attract a new group to the town centre once the residential units come to market in the next five years.

"It was felt that, as the Councils, if we wanted to see that change, we were going to have to drive it ourselves and put the investment in."

Catherine Marks, Service Manager: Regeneration & Place Shaping Communities, Warwickshire Council



What does it look and feel like to live and breathe the Place of Nuneaton?

The afternoon of the first day provided the opportunity for our Place Leaders to immerse themselves in the town centre of Nuneaton. The cohort witnessed firsthand the locations for the programme of interventions through the walking tour, they soaked in the atmosphere and experienced the hum of the town.

Key takeaways from our Place Leaders included:

- The challenges from Nuneaton are far from unique, the retail post-apocalyptic scene in the town centre is one we have all seen before
- If you look at a map and see the wider connectivity of Nuneaton as a place, both North, East, South and West and both rail and road and you see this place is the centre of the universe, it should be booming
- Fully pedestrianised, which is a powerful characteristic as a starting point
- The sheer size and space available in the town centre is a brilliant canvas, which a lot of town centres would be envious of
- The existing ring road provides 360-degree access to the town centre
- After speaking to the residents there was awareness that the hotel was coming but they didn't articulate the full programme and the bigger picture
- All the jigsaw pieces are there, existing master plans and visions, they just need pulling together into a compelling and creative offer.

Further challenges from our Place Leaders included:

- The purpose of the place seemed to be missing for residents and businesses, could the 'why' be made stronger?
- The vision could contain more uniqueness and passion for Nuneaton
- Were the voices of people who will be here for the next 50 years loud enough and could that influence local politics
- People feel they've 'lost' something but is this clear and captured in the Masterplan
- Clarity and consistency of the branding could help to empower and strengthen the delivery of the message
- There could be further opportunities to engage local community organisations to input views and local insight into the development of the masterplan

"Why is Nuneaton known as Treacle Town? "When poet William Hutton visited Nuneaton in the 18th century, he described the town as being in the 'dominion of sleep'. The reality of being known as Treacle Town is it has traditionally operated at a very slow pace."

Danny Gilbert, Strategy Director, Amey

Making a stronger case for Place

To tackle the brief, the day was split into 3 sessions using Nuneaton as the basis for all discussions. The team was asked to draw on their learning to date and the use of the 'Stronger Places Assessment Toolkit' to evaluate how Nuneaton and their partners are currently 'Advocating', 'Planning' and 'Facilitating investment' to create a stronger Nuneaton.

Workshop 1

Advocating the case for a stronger Nuneaton:

Strength areas:

- Senior council leaders and local politicians are clearly advocating the programme
- Clear visible investment within the town centre, witnessed during the tour, from independents, chains and local communities such as the Gurkhas
- Clear visible engagement of young people, not only on the site hoardings, but through the King Edward VI College pioneering the change through wanting to be a part of Nuneaton
- The library itself which hosted the cohort yesterday was a constant hive of activity and 'will not be moved'
- The connectivity of the town provides a significant opportunity to drive the narrative of a commuter town
- The new hotel will be a strong advocate for Nuneaton.

Improvement areas:

- There is a need for more planned advocacy. Could Nuneaton create a strong bridge link with the local communities?
- The cohort saw a large amount of street artwork decorating the grey landscape. Is there an opportunity for Nuneaton to capture more around local artists?
- Are there digital advocates who could translate their passion for the town?
- Can the local history be elevated? Let's celebrate 'Trickle Town', the history of George Eliot and the coal-mining industry. What is it that shapes the culture of Nuneaton?
- Stronger and more aligned branding could be made more visible throughout the town, what is the narrative of the town now?
- Community and green spaces need to be created and local community groups could be capitalised on to enhance these.



Workshop 2

Planning for a stronger Nuneaton:

Strength areas:

- Transforming Nuneaton has been elected member-led and successful in raising £160m of capital funding - a powerful story
- A new Pathfinder Board has been established to generate representation within the third sector and education
- As the plans have been developed over the last 15 years, there is a huge wealth of knowledge that has gone into creating the latest master plan
- 'Bookend' approach is a rather neat way of describing the development approach
- Strong development partner in the Warwickshire Property Development Group - unusual to have this in-house capability and shows investment in the long-term growth.

Improvement areas:

- 'Transforming Nuneaton' document itself isn't visionary, could do with a refresh
- Strengthen the story telling and translate into all documents
- Are there set levels of resource to bring together the vision?
- As an Infrastructure and Planning plan it is not holistic, could it link in better with the health and wellbeing plan for the time?
- Collate the local plans to simplify collateral and make clear which document is driving what?
- Maximise the benefits for the town centre and beyond by bringing local people in to the softer planning areas.



Workshop 3

Facilitating Investment to create a Stronger Nuneaton:

Strength areas:

- £160m of funding has been secured, through many years of having plans in place to be adapted and tweaked as and when opportunities arrive and keeping Nuneaton as the council's top priority
- Proactive approach to negotiating and retaining funds
- There is currently a growing level of private sector interest over the last 2 years. Could this be seen as confidence in the Place of Nuneaton?
- Low level of vacant retail units and diversity of shops in the town centre are positive
- In-house capability of Warwickshire Property Development Group is attractive to investors

Improvement areas:

- Explore and understand more around Micro-investment
- Further investigation of anchor institutions, George Eliot Hospital and the College are known investments coming into the town. Are there further opportunities with local organisations?
- Keeping the Nuneaton pound within Nuneaton, further requirements to procure locally?
- Are there further opportunities to tap into small local businesses and link them with the colleges?

"Thanks to ADEPT, Amey and my colleagues for their input into "kicking the tyres" on Transforming Nuneaton. I wasn't sure what to expect but have come away with renewed optimism for the programme and plenty of ideas that we will build in."

Mark Ryder, Executive Director for Communities, Warwickshire County Council

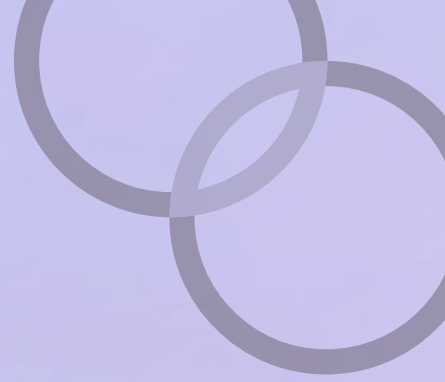
In conclusion

As the final session for the 2024 cohort came to a close, the Council leaders of Warwickshire gave their thanks and appreciation to the cohort for their input. They welcomed the opportunity to step back and reflect on their own journey and to answer questions on their programme, that they had been so deeply invested in.

The Place Leader's PACE 2024 ADEPT and Amey programme has brought together a space for senior Place Leaders to find strategic solutions to the wicked issues facing the public sector. Across the three sessions, our Place Leaders have explored the importance of 'Advocating', 'Planning' and 'Facilitating investment' to create a stronger Place, to influence the future of place-focused strategies and support Place Leaders in driving change.

As an output of the PACE programme, a Stronger Places Assessment Toolkit has been created in collaboration with the cohort and can provide support to Local Government professionals in assessing their own Place ambitions.

To access the Toolkit, please visit the ADEPT website.









ADEPT  Amey

PACE 