



Local Trust

Big Local

A level playing field

How sport can unite
and transform communities

Ryan Herman

About the author

Ryan Herman has been writing about sport for over 25 years in national newspapers, websites and magazines. Former editor of Sky Sports Magazine and a current contributing editor for Director Magazine, Ryan's work has been published in FourFourTwo, Vice, SportBusiness International, The Rugby Journal, Gallop and BT Sport. In October 2019 he was appointed Local Trust's second journalist-at-large, reporting on community experiences of our changing social and political landscape in Big Local areas.

Local Trust

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Registered in England and Wales

Big Local Trust charity number 1145916

Local Trust company number 07833396

and charity number 1147511

Big Local is managed by Local Trust and funded by
The National Lottery Community Fund.

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ISBN: 978-1-9998292-7-8

Published: October 2019

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FOREWORD

BIG LOCAL IS ONE OF THE MOST radical and exciting grant programmes ever launched by a major lottery funder. Between 2010 and 2012, the National Lottery Community Fund identified 150 areas that had historically missed out on lottery and other funding. Each of those areas was allocated £1m of Big Local funding. This could be spent in any way they chose, provided residents organised themselves locally to plan and manage that funding, involving the wider community in the decision-making process.

Often these areas missed out in the past because of a lack of the local social and civic infrastructure needed to bring people together to apply for lottery grants or organize themselves to tackle big issues in their community. Big Local was therefore designed from the outset not just to provide funding for projects, but to do so in a way that would build community capacity, confidence and skills in the longer term.

The rules, constraints and priorities that define Big Local have been for local people to decide. By design, the programme is bottom-up and community led; there are no top-down targets or centrally imposed delivery models. The timeframe for Big Local extends over fifteen years, allowing communities to take their time, build confidence and skills, make decisions and deliver change, without the usual pressures to meet end-of-year- spend targets or other arbitrary, bureaucratic deadlines.

The activities and initiatives that Big Local areas have chosen to support reflect the diversity of the communities

themselves, but across the country, sport features time and again as a major area of investment. In this essay, Ryan Herman explores the short- and long-term impact of sport in communities, from curbing child malnourishment and crime rates, to nurturing young female leaders, to addressing community cohesion. We see how residents of Big Local areas have collectively developed the skills, networks and confidence to continue to lead their areas into the future, through sports initiatives.

Since the 2012 Olympics, the country has continued to ponder the question of lasting legacy from sport. Herman asks whether the greatest enduring benefit of sport is in fact the ‘soft legacy’ of local communities and lives changed.

This is the latest essay in a series in which Local Trust has invited a range of writers, thinkers and researchers to help understand the context and relevance of Big Local. From the benefits of investment in social infrastructure, to releasing the potential of young people, to the role of creativity in building sustainable communities, these essays look at the programme from multiple of angles. The aim is to draw out lessons that can inform wider debates on shared prosperity, community and place.

We hope that ‘A level playing field’ provides a similarly important contribution to another critical public debate.

Matt Leach

Chief executive Local Trust



The 2018 Klondike Grand Prix, East Cleveland

INTRODUCTION

Sport is the great British success story of this decade

WE EXCEL AT HOSTING AND COMPETING in major events—few products have been exported as successfully as the Premier League, and the London Olympics was almost universally hailed as a triumphant statement by a new, confident Britain.

Sport is also one of the few aspects of modern British life that succeeds in uniting us on a mass scale, irrespective of class, race or politics. Its importance stretches far beyond basking in gold-medal glory or winning a penalty shoot-out.

And as factories close, local shops get boarded up, town centres become ghost towns, and so-called ‘tough decisions’ have to be made about council services, so a team, an event or a sporting institution becomes the one constant, the real heartbeat of a local community.

To quote British playwright David Hare, “A city isn’t a city without a post office, a football stadium and a theatre.”

But one could argue that—despite lottery millions flowing

into sport, and ever-increasing media coverage—there is a growing disconnect between consumption and participation.

At the last count, 210 school playing fields have been sold since 2010. And it's not just a matter of blaming the current government; land was being sold off at a similar rate under Labour. However, before 2012, schools in England were required to have at least 5,000 square metres of outdoor space for children to play on. Now, a school simply has to provide 'suitable outdoor space', whatever that is.

In December 2018, *The Mirror* reported: 'The UK has lost 1,295 grass pitches, swimming pools, sports halls and athletics tracks during the past two years.'

And, following a season in which English clubs were overwhelmingly dominant in European football, *The Guardian* published a story in June 2019 revealing that '700 council football pitches have been lost since 2010.'

And nationally, Sport England's recent funding strategy has seen a significant move away from the funding of sport for its own sake, towards a more general goal of promoting physical activity across the population.

But if national and local government are scaling back from their support for sport, at a neighbourhood level we have seen many Big Local areas—communities benefiting from £1m each of lottery funds to spend on their own priorities—placing sport, or sport-related projects, among their top priorities when deciding how to spend their own resources. This has sometimes been because facilities and playing spaces were either under threat or inaccessible, or had simply disappeared; and often because, at a grassroots level, there has always been a strong understanding of the value of sport to community and place.

To explore this idea further, I visited five Big Local areas to see how sport is helping to rebuild communities. I also wanted to find out what happens more generally when those

communities are put in charge and given the opportunity to shape the future of their own neighbourhoods.

While there is an ongoing debate around what sort of legacy is, or isn't, being created by Britain's sporting success on the world stage, can projects driven purely by local interests actually be more effective when it comes to delivering lasting and meaningful impact?



Cavendish Park, Barrow In Furness

Part One

Barrow Island, Cumbria

"We're forging more relationships, which I don't think could have been happened without this. If you build it, they will come."

'HOW TO BUILD A NUCLEAR SUBMARINE' is a BBC documentary, first broadcast in 2010, about the making of Astute—a multi-billion-pound feat of modern engineering which, in terms of scale and complexity, has been likened to constructing an underwater space shuttle.

Each Astute submarine is built on Barrow Island by BAE Systems in Devonshire Dock Hall—an indoor assembly complex big enough to accommodate several football pitches, also known as Maggie's Farm, because it was opened by Margaret Thatcher in 1986.

The submarines are fitted with a nuclear reactor and, when the first Astute was launched nine years ago, BAE Systems had to publish a booklet for people who lived nearby titled, 'What to do in the event of a radiation emergency'.

However, as local resident Eric Wood tells the camera crew, "People around here are more worried about where their

next shilling is coming from.”

Across the UK, prosperity can often find itself rubbing shoulders with poverty, but Barrow Island is a special case in point.

Barrow-in-Furness is very much out on a limb, close to the border between Lancashire and Cumbria. It is often called Britain’s longest cul-de-sac, because there is only one A-road in and out of town and it’s 33 miles to the nearest motorway. Barrow Island is a further mile out and exists in the shadow of the 160-acre BAE Systems site.

Its economy has long since been at the mercy of international conflict. Submarine building began here in 1886, but the end of the Cold War meant thousands of people weren’t going to work on Maggie’s Farm no more. Now that geopolitical instability is back on trend, BAE has invested millions in new facilities and won billions in new contracts.

In stark contrast, little has changed for the islanders, many of whom reside in tenement blocks built in the late 19th century, when people flocked here to work at the world’s largest steel mill.

During that boom time, Barrow Island’s Cavendish Park became home to the town’s rugby and cricket clubs, and it is said that W.G. Grace once played here. There was even a velodrome built at ‘Cav Park’.

When war broke out in 1914, the land was requisitioned and the sports teams moved to Barrow-in-Furness, never to return.

Over the years, other clubs that called Cav Park home had to take their ball and find somewhere else to play, or simply stopped playing altogether.

This included Marsh Hornets, a junior Rugby League team that has produced a string of professional players, including

current Castleford Tigers hooker, Jacques O'Neill.

Around 12 years ago, the running of Cav Park was handed over by Barrow Borough Council to the Playing Fields Association, who turfed out the Hornets in favour of senior men's football teams.

It was only through the sheer determination of people like Rob McAlloone, a sports coach and director of the Barrow Island Community Sports Trust (BICST), that the Hornets is still going.

Matt Clark is a church warden and Chairman of the Barrow Island Football Association. He coached youth teams here for over 30 years and says that kids were also eventually barred from playing football on Cav Park. Barrow Island Primary School's sports day suffered a similar fate.

But it wasn't just ball games that suffered.

Joanne Leach has been running the Islanders Dance Troupe for over 20 years. She explains, "When the old community centre closed [in 2007], the only way we could practise was by dancing outside on the backstreets. Sometimes that would be on rainy nights, or we would gather in somebody's house. We'd have so many girls in one room and so many in another, just trying to do whatever we could to keep it going.

"We've got 54 girls so the idea of putting them all in someone's house wasn't ideal!"

And as local amenities shut down, so crime went up.

Located on the edge of Barrow Island, Egerton Court may not be central, but it's the epicentre of the community's problems. Last year, following a spate of drug-related deaths, the media descended on the 'Ego'. Tenants may have dependency issues or have been recently released from prison. Meanwhile, absentee landlords don't have to worry about a

property being trashed or taken over by drug dealers, as long as they receive a cheque from the council.

Across the road from Egerton Court is the Grade-II listed Devonshire Buildings. You can immediately spot the difference, because the well-maintained blocks have their window frames painted white and the brickwork is clean. Egerton Court has barely seen a lick of paint. Some windows are smashed, others are boarded up.

In other words, Egerton Court isn't typical of the area as a whole, but because of all those years of setbacks, cuts and a lack of investment, Barrow Island was an obvious candidate for Big Local support.

Bob Huitson, a former Rugby League referee and chair of BICST, recalls that people kept saying, "What are you going to do with it [the million]?" "So we said, "Well, what do you want to do with it?"

Much like in Tesco or Waitrose, when you collect a token and choose a charity, residents were asked how they would like to spend the money and put tokens into pots. Bob says that around 90% of the imaginary fund went into the pot marked 'Sports and Community Centre'.

Bob and Rob McAloone are two sides of the same coin. Bob is a pragmatist, whereas Rob is more of an idealist, but they both care passionately about Barrow Island.

Rob attended the first Big Local meetings and says, "We were being advised to spend £10k here, £10k there. That wound me up because I thought we could do most of that stuff ourselves."

Bob adds, "We contacted the council to say, 'We need somewhere to build a community centre.' They said, 'Where could you do it?' and we said that Cav Park was the only place. They agreed but said, 'We need the lease for the land and the

lease for the pitches.”

Once those leases were agreed, the islanders effectively took over the playing fields that once used to be prone to flooding. Now they are properly maintained and are so good that teams from 10 miles away come to play here.

The new hub in Cav Park opened in May 2018. At around £650,000, it is the largest sports-related Big Local project in terms of cost, most of which came from the £1 million budget, but also through donations from Cumbria County Council, Sir John Fisher Foundation and WREN, a non-profit which awards grants for community projects.

England and Manchester City footballer (and Barrow resident) Georgia Stanway attended the grand opening, and the cutting of the ribbon was conducted by Matt Clark—a fitting gesture for a man who has given so much of his life to community work on Barrow Island.

“To know that we can give the kids a facility like this has made us all feel ten feet tall”, he says. “I came here when I was 22 years old, I got married and stayed here ever since. This building has been the main change for the community.”

Now that Joanne Leach and her dancers have a new home, they are winning tournaments. “It was such a relief to tell the other kids that we had somewhere that we could go, and that dancing could carry on. A community relies on having a place where people can go, do activities and meet up. It wasn’t just me who struggled without it.”

This summer Cav Park once again hosted Fudstock—a festival in honour of local musician Richard ‘Fud’ Thorne—which last year raised £38,000 for a local hospice. Police estimate that the 2019 festival attracted around 3,000 people.

Councillors and landlords are using this facility to hold meetings and tackle some of the island’s problems. Events are

put on for pensioners who previously had nowhere else to go.

For Rob, in particular, it's much more than just bricks and mortar.

"Back in December, I was rushed into hospital with a brain tumour. I had surgery and, because I was a scaffolder, I wasn't allowed to go back to work. This place has kept me focused and kept me going. I could have easily slumped into depression.

"My close friends and family have helped me through, along with lads I played rugby with when I was younger—the community you build around yourself. Some people have told me off for doing too much work here. But they understand why I've done it.

"Me and Bob are always meeting up to walk our dogs and we talk about what else we do to improve things. Our missuses must think we're having an affair. 'You're going out with the dog again? Right, okay.' But we meet up and we put the world to rights.

"Our vision is to get a transfer of assets from the council and give it back to Barrow Island so the community can run it."

To anyone who doesn't live here, the hub may simply look like a functional building at the end of a muddy slip road, albeit with a kitchen to die for and shower facilities as good as some professional clubs.

But the hope is that it represents something bigger: a turning point, after so many years of setbacks, closures and negativity, that will continue to serve the people of Barrow Island long after Big Local ends.

Or, as Rob says, "I see this as the start of something. We're forging more relationships within the community and beyond which I don't think could have been happened without this. If you build it, they will come."



Emily Wilde at Fudstock 2018, Cavendish Park



Batgirls' youngest league player, Mya Saleem, in training

Part Two

Dewsbury Moor, West Yorkshire

"If kids play together at a young age, they don't see race."

THERE IS AN IMAGINARY LINE THAT SPLITS Dewsbury Moor's white and Asian communities.

On a Saturday night at the end of May, two separate celebrations are taking place a half a mile from each other, on either side of this virtual divide.

Dewsbury Moor Amateur Rugby League Football Club (ARLFC) is hosting a reunion party for its greatest team—the team that won the National League title back in 1997, the team that produced a Super League winner (Matt Diskin) and a Hollywood tough guy (Keith Mason).

On the other side, you'll find the Masjid E Madani and Muhaddis E Azam Education Centre, where they are hosting Taste Ramadan— an opportunity for this local mosque to open its doors to all denominations.

Other than a postcode, they may seemingly have little in common, but together they are trying to bring more cohesion to what has often been viewed from the outside as a split community.

Dewsbury is a short train journey from Leeds. It used to be the home of ‘shoddy’, a process of making new products out of old scraps of wool—in other words, recycling.

Now, there is just a handful of local enterprises in the town centre, including Guns & Roses, which literally sells shotguns and floral arrangements.

Dewsbury Moor is a mile and a half from the town centre. Home to around 5,500 people, it is still defined by the events of 2008 and the abduction of Shannon Matthews. And tensions between communities in nearby Dewsbury has also made it a target for far-right extremists on recruitment drives for new members.

But if there is a theme running through the story of Dewsbury Moor Big Local, it’s one of perception.

Four years ago, Gary Widdop was at Leeds Crown Court having pleaded guilty to possession and intent to supply cocaine as well as growing cannabis.

“I was stood in the dock looking at the judge, the man who is going to decide your future. No amount of money is worth that. I thought I was looking at seven years. Nailed on. See you later,” he says.

Based purely on that information, he wouldn’t strike you as an obvious choice to be a Big Local community worker, or somebody you would trust with a £1 million budget.

“It may sound strange, but when I was arrested, I felt this huge weight off my shoulders. The day after, I went back home and took a selfie with my wife and son. That picture is still on the side in our house and I still get emotional thinking about it. That moment was the start of the rest of my life.”

As we take a tour around Dewsbury Moor, he presents a folder filled with cuttings, testimonials, a character reference from a local councillor, and pictures of community events that he organised and junior rugby league teams that he coached.

That folder convinced m'lud that Gary should get a two-year suspended sentence.

"I remember it so clearly. The judge said, 'This is my court, this is my decision, and nobody will question it. If I send this man to jail, I won't sleep.'"

Dewsbury Moor Big Local stood by Gary and the Rugby Football League allowed him to continue coaching.

Getting a second chance gave him a new sense of purpose and the desire to make a difference.

Dewsbury Moor is made up of five estates. Two are mostly populated by Asian families; another two are predominantly white; and then, last of all, there is Moorside, where Gary lives, and where Shannon used to live, and which—over the last decade—has gone from being a no-go area for Asians to Dewsbury Moor's most diverse estate.

That's not to say old prejudices don't still exist.

Gary adds, "The amount of abuse I get for my role in Big Local, even from people I know...

"They will say, 'You're a Paki lover.' But these are people who I don't think have come into contact with Muslims, and so much of it has been driven by social media. One person shares something and there's no truth behind it."

He has been collaborating with Starr Zaman, who has decades of experience in community projects around Dewsbury and who had the idea for Taste Ramadan.

Starr says, "Myself and Gary talk about what is achievable and realistic from both sides but also how communities might perceive what we do." Dewsbury Moor Big Local has made a point of splitting money evenly across the communities to dispel any rumour or suggestion of favouritism.

Starr's wife is Jewish, and he adds, "We celebrate Eid, we celebrate Hanukkah, we celebrate Christmas. The reason we do it is we want to give everyone the best experience. That's

important to me, because some people think you shouldn't do those other things, that you should exist in your own bubble. And I see that from both sides.

"Long term, I hope the mosque will be doing those sorts of events on a regular basis. We have a vision to create a community programme that can benefit everyone."

Around 80 to 100 people attend the Taste Ramadan event, half of whom are non-Muslim. Over the course of an hour we learn about why Muslims fast, what Islam stands for and its close ties to Judaism. It's a great chance to experience and understand somebody else's culture.

And who could possibly turn down the offer of a free curry?

Among those also in attendance is Dewsbury MP Paula Sherrieff.

"Using food is a great way to bring people together. You can sit down and break bread," she says. "It's important that people get the chance to ask questions and dispel myths about Islam. Much the same as any religion, there are lots of misconceptions about what Islam means.

"My concern, if you like, is that for a lot of the people who turned up, you're preaching to the converted. How do we harness the good work from hosting multifaith events?

"It could be things like working with schools and nurseries, taking non-Muslim kids into a mosque. But, equally, taking Muslim kids into a church or a synagogue or a temple.

"And it shouldn't be limited to once a year during Ramadan. How do we build on that? It just kind of happens and then it's put in a box until the next time. We need to get press releases out or encourage people to write a letter to the paper that they went to Taste Ramadan, it was a great experience, it was interactive, it was transparent..."

You are left with this feeling that, if only more people did

this... But as Gary rightly observes, “You can lead a horse to water...”

Paula acknowledges that the best opportunities for different faiths and communities to mix will happen around crafts, sports or a coffee morning,

“Sport is where we’ve witnessed some of the best cohesion projects,” Paula says, and she talks about BatGirls, a rounders club which is outward looking and doesn’t conform to that cliché of Muslim women spending all their time indoors.

BatGirls was born out of Ready, Steady, Active—a sport, health and fitness programme started by Rashida Salloo in Dewsbury and Batley, with a focus on BAME females. Rashida went on to be shortlisted for The Times Sportswoman of the Year Community Award in 2017.

Back then, BatGirls started off with seven players and now has 25.

Siddeeqah Azmi has been with the club from the start. She explains: “We’ve got people working on coaching, marketing, sponsorship, welfare. They are just local ladies who have day jobs, but we’ve learned all these transferable skills. That is something we’re really proud of. We also do a lot of charity work together, and we all get involved with each other’s causes.”

When they found out about Big Local, BatGirls contacted Gary Widdop who put them in touch with (Dewsbury Moor ARLFC President) Peter Charlesworth. “Initially we went in hoping it would be a route for funding and we ended up with a new home ground instead!

“That is why we are so excited to have this association with Dewsbury Moor Rugby League. We had the chance to play at Mount Cricket Club [a Muslim team from nearby Batley] but thought it would be good to go to a demographically different area, meet new people and play with women of all

cultures.”

They now play on Sundays and Wednesdays on one of Dewsbury Moor’s three pitches.

Siddeequah adds, “If we can bring people from different cultures together, that would be amazing. At the moment we play in a league which has teams that are primarily from one background, but our vision is to have a team made up of ladies from all different backgrounds. It will be good to go on that journey together with Dewsbury Moor.”

Peter Charlesworth is one of my dinner dates at Taste Ramadan. He recalls that a few years back the council set up a cohesion team. “We were invited to the town hall to speak to the community. I said that one way of getting people closer together is through sport. If kids play together at a young age, they don’t see race. They will grow up with other kids from other communities.”

Gary picks up the point and says, “Once kids get to nine or ten, the chances are that you’ve lost them. You have to start that process when they’re five years old.”

The rugby club is about to get a complete makeover. New changing rooms, showers and disabled facilities will mean being able to accommodate more teams across all sports, along with making this the main social venue in Dewsbury Moor.

Peter says, “Women’s rugby has taken off big-time around here. We host football, archery, rounders. We want this place to host parties, christenings... If we can accommodate them, we will take all-comers.”

Whilst the line that exists between these communities may never totally disappear, there is hope that, with the help of sport and some committed, visionary local residents, it will become increasingly blurred.



The Dewsbury Moor ARLFC girls team



Locals line the streets for the 2018 Klondike Grand Prix

Part Three

East Cleveland Villages, North Yorkshire

"The more and more I had somebody in my face telling me, 'You cannot do this, you are not physically able to do it,' the more it made me just go, 'Screw you, I can and I will.'"

THE TOUR DE YORKSHIRE IS THE UK'S BIGGEST annual spectator event in our sporting calendar. An estimated 2.6 million people lined the streets to watch this four-day race in 2018¹. Not bad, when you consider that it only started in 2014.

Councils apply for the right to host the start or finish of a stage, and this year there were 18 bids for one of the eight slots.

The event is run by Welcome to Yorkshire, the tourism agency for 'God's own country' (as Yorkshire is often described); but the build-up to this year's race was

¹ The estimated figure for 2019 was 1.96 million. Tour de Yorkshire, <https://letour.yorkshire.com/information/economic-impact>

overshadowed by the controversial departure of its chief executive, and critics questioning whether councils should be spending around £150,000 on hosting a stage of a bike race while also wielding the axe on public services. And all this was happening in the run-up to the local elections in May 2019.

To counter those arguments, Welcome to Yorkshire pointed to an economic-impact study compiled by Leeds Beckett University. Based on a survey of 3,000 people who attended the Tour de Yorkshire in 2018, it estimated that the race was worth £98m² to Yorkshire in terms of money spent on accommodation, travel, food and so on. Plus, the live coverage that the race receives on ITV4 could be viewed as a four-day-long TV advert for the county³. Beat that for brand awareness.

Looking from the outside, what appeared to get lost in all this is what the race means to the people.

East Cleveland Villages Big Local is on the outskirts of North Yorkshire and was once home to a thriving mining industry. The last ironstone mine in North Skelton closed in 1964, a point in time from which the area has never really recovered. As former Big Local Chair Mary Lanigan says, “We’ve always been out on a limb here.”

And while the Tour de Yorkshire was transforming neighbouring towns and villages into a week-long street party, East Cleveland hadn’t received an invite.

Each Big Local area presents its own unique challenges, and it is hard enough to get consensus on how to spend £1million from people who live in the same street, let alone across a cluster of villages spanning 11 miles from Dunsdale to Easington, with a combined population of around 14,000,

² The estimated figure for 2019 was £60m. Tour de Yorkshire, <https://letour.yorkshire.com/information/economic-impact>

³ The estimated worldwide viewing figure for 2019 was 28m. Tour de Yorkshire, <https://letour.yorkshire.com/information/economic-impact>

ranging from 5,000 residents in Loftus to 200 in Margrove Park.

Mary adds, “The villages had their own identity. When Big Local started, it was extremely difficult to get things done. I got frustrated. But you’ve got to make decisions and sometimes people don’t like it. You can’t have eleven different people saying, ‘Do it that way.’”

Mary is well versed in the machinations of local government politics, having recently been appointed for her second stint as independent leader of Redcar and Cleveland Council.

“There’s been some extremely strong views expressed from me for certain people to back off, because this is about community.”

Local Trust insists that the money should be spent on projects that will serve the community as a whole. Given East Cleveland’s lack of visibility and the Big Local programme target of ‘making people feel better about their area’, the founder members of the East Cleveland Villages Big Local took a unique approach and decided that investing in tourism would become a priority.

This was the challenge facing Jayne Barnard when she became Tourism Officer for East Cleveland Villages in 2016.

The strapline of the job description was ‘Put East Cleveland back on the map’—easier said than done, when you also consider that Whitby and the North York Moors are virtually on its doorstep.

Soon after taking up her new role, Jayne was watching the Tour de Yorkshire whiz through the streets of Great Ayton, just outside of the Big Local catchment area.

“It couldn’t have lasted more than 15 seconds,” she says. “But they put bands on, they shut the roads, everyone was happy and smiling.”

She realised a solution was staring her in the face, if only for 15 seconds, and that a similar event could galvanise those 11 villages around one grand project—a bike race to rebuild a region.

“My view was, if Great Ayton could make this amount of effort, what could East Cleveland do? We’re lucky because we have moorland, woodland and coastline here.”

She spoke to Velo29, a company based in Leeds that stages cycling events across the north of England, and the management were immediately sold on the idea.

The next step was to come up with a title. ‘Riding the Klondike’ sounds like something that has been around for years, rather than a name recently conjured up by former Big Local worker, Mike Jefferson.

As she takes me on a guided tour of the course, Jayne explains, “People from all over the UK would travel to Skinningrove to mine iron ore and the locals nicknamed it the Klondike. Iron ore was the gold of the North East.

“Mike said, ‘We need something that people are going to remember,’ and it worked because it has raised the profile of this area.”

So, the East Cleveland Klondike was pitched to British Cycling, who loved it so much they decided it should be part of what is currently known as the National Road Series.

You don’t have to be a pro cyclist, or an amateur for that matter, to appreciate why British Cycling was instantly sold on the Klondike.

The riders hurtle downhill through Brotton into Saltburn, which features a steep winding road, known as the Saltburn Bank, from the seafront to the promenade. This is followed by a punishing and sustained 600ft uphill climb through Skelton into Boosbeck.

The course takes you through villages and the countryside, past local landmarks, including the fairy-tale cottages at North Shire, through to a grandstand finish in Guisborough.

But while Jayne faced an anxious wait for British Cycling to rubber stamp and approve a race route, it was also a race against time to get every other potential stakeholder to give it the green light.

“The more and more I had somebody in my face telling me, ‘You cannot do this’, the more it made me just go, ‘I can, and I will.’

“It was a constant diet of evening meetings, press releases, posts on Facebook, any platform that I could find and use to meet with people.

“A lot of people had said, ‘It’s nothing to do with us,’ because they expected it to fail—not in a negative way, but simply because it’s the nature of the beast. The people of East Cleveland are so used to being told, ‘Put a Post-it note on a noticeboard and tell us what you want and then we’ll take your money somewhere else.’

“Then British Cycling said yes. Suddenly those doors opened.”

The first Klondike was held in April 2017 and was covered live in the UK by Eurosport, with highlights of the race broadcast around the world. It also received further exposure through the BBC, cycling magazines, websites, blogs and local media outlets. The race itself featured riders from across Europe and was won by Team Wiggins rider, Chris Latham.

On race days, the streets have been lined with green-and-gold bunting and people have knitted cycle jerseys, spray-painted bikes, painted houses, held street parties, put on cycle surgeries, set up food stalls and hosted live entertainment.

It’s not been without its dramas. A mix-up over the

attendance figures led to a visit from anti-terrorism police. But this year, for the first time, 85 of Europe's elite women riders tackled the Klondike.

Meanwhile, Mary is optimistic that the Tour de Yorkshire will finally be coming through East Cleveland in 2020, although the route won't be confirmed until December.

Former New Skelton delegate Julie Craig speaks for many in East Cleveland when she says, "We need to make sure this continues beyond Big Local. [If it didn't happen] you'd think, has it all been worth it? Well, of course it has, for that one day. But beyond that, it would be devastating to lose it."

Originally, East Cleveland Villages Big Local committed £145,000 over three years, which, excluding certain operational costs, expired in 2019. In late September, an agreement was struck with Velo29 meaning the Klondike will return in 2020, with further talks expected with potential sponsors to see if it can be extended to 2022. By any rational measurement, the Klondike exceeded all expectations.

As yet, nobody has done an economic study of the Klondike. Jayne says, "When I was asked by the Local Trust, 'How do you measure success?' I said the success is simply that it happened."

But there is another way to judge its impact, which is by no means scientific but demonstrates how a bike race has helped to restore confidence and pride to this disparate group of villages.

On a drizzly, slate-grey Saturday afternoon, Boosbeck Village Hall is preparing for an American diner night, and the walls are lined with pictures of icons from the golden age of Hollywood.

When they held the first Klondike, this building was locked up. At that time, Paula Miller was the Boosbeck

delegate for East Cleveland Big Local.

Paula says, “Since the mines shut, we’ve had nothing. Even the Post Office closed down. And there is a knock-on effect because people have to go elsewhere to do anything, and whatever money they have to spend is being spent elsewhere. So, you can understand why people sigh and say, ‘I don’t want to get involved,’ because the spirit is lost.

“But the Klondike gave us the confidence to think we could make a difference. We had a meeting and I said to the committee, ‘All of us who have pulled together on the Klondike, I bet we could work together to open up the village hall.’

“A lady came along from the Village Hall Association of Great Britain. At that meeting, anyone who wanted to be involved put their hands up to say, ‘I want to be a trustee.’

“We formed a committee, we secured an alcohol license and we’re now talking about extending this hall. If it wasn’t for the Klondike, this wouldn’t have happened.”



Young riders at Jumpclub BMX, Sidley

Part Four

Heart of Sidley, East Sussex

'Fast is fine, but radness is everything.'

BACK IN THE LATE 1980S AND EARLY 1990S, Keith Duly was one of the UK's top BMX riders—a three-time national champion who competed under the moniker of Jim Dirt.

As nicknames go, it can't really hold a candle to Keith's former teammate Carl 'Sex on Wheels' Alford, or the late, great Dave 'Miracle Boy' Mirra, but it has kind of stuck ever since.

It was during that period, that Keith saw the place where he was born and bred, a residential village in East Sussex called Sidley, become one of the sport's coolest destinations.

"BMX was pretty much dead and bike sales were down. Yet for some weird reason this place was really buzzing," he says.

"We had US pros coming down here and magazines were writing pieces saying that Sidley was staging some of the most important BMX events in Europe at that time. For a little town like this, at a time when the sport was on its arse, was incredible."

This stretch of the South Coast can lay claim to being the British home of BMX.

Six miles away in Hastings is where you can find Source

Park, the world's biggest underground indoor skatepark, opened in 2016.

Hastings was once known as the Costa del Dole, and now they call it Shoreditch on Sea. Just down the road is Bexhill, a sleepy, seaside retirement town. But Sidley, which has a population of 4,500, has become one of those in-between places that you drive through on the way to somewhere else.

"We have a lot of social housing and a lot of young families," says Heart of Sidley Big chair Jay Carroll. "In the local primary school, over 50% of pupils are on free school meals. That gives an idea of the challenges some of our families face.

"Providing kids with access to sporting facilities is particularly important."

The BMX track is located at the end of a road with houses on one side and Sidley Recreation Ground on the other. There is a small slope at the end of a football pitch which runs into the track. Because it's secluded, kids will inevitably gather here in the summer for reasons other than riding a bike.

It's also a great example of what can be achieved through persistence and passion. The track was built by local children and their parents, including Keith's mum, Corrine, who explains, "We held jumble sales and set up committee meetings to raise the money. It's so close to where people live, so the kids policed it because they helped to build it. There was a real sense of ownership."

Sidley gained cult status through events like Backyard Jam, when the Duly household was transformed into a B&B for BMX.

Corinne recalls, "We had a team from Denmark in one room and the Scots in another. People would camp out around the track.

“Big American stars like Fuzzy Hall and Dennis McCoy came over. I had kids lined up in my garden to get their autographs. The problem was that it actually got too big and there were 2,000 people here. So, they moved the event to a different venue.”

But over the years the track became increasingly difficult to maintain and its days were seemingly numbered, until Keith approached Heart of Sidley Big Local, who supplied him with a £5,000 grant that was topped up through other fundraising events. Saving and rebuilding Jim Dirt’s Jump Club has been a collective, community-led effort, just as it was when the track was first built all those years ago, and it was enough to revive BMX racing in Sidley.

Now 40 kids regularly turn up for Saturday morning sessions at Jump Club and there is a waiting list for new members.

The club’s motto is ‘Fast is fine, but radness is everything.’ For those of a certain age, Radness can be interpreted as something that is beyond cool, but it is also about having the right attitude. You could call it a take on, ‘It’s not what you do, it’s the way that you do it.’ Having that ethos, or culture, is important, because Sidley can’t help but suffer in comparison to other BMX parks that have quicker starting gates, newer facilities and faster tarmac tracks.

So, when Jump Club competes against other teams, the odds are stacked against them. And that can be a humbling experience, especially for a young child.

Twelve-year-old Joe Smith, aka Joe Pro, is one of Jump Club’s most promising young riders.

He says, “I watched BMX at the [2012] Olympics and it looked great. I didn’t know about the track until my brother started coming here. Then I saw some of the kids doing these

massive jumps and I thought, oh yeah...

“But when I first competed for Jump Club [against Gravesend CycloPark], we got demolished and it was pretty demoralising. What I learned is you have to keep on practising and working hard.”

Joe worked hard enough to reach the quarter finals at this year’s National Championships in Manchester. But, as Keith constantly tries to impress upon these kids, it’s about more than winning races.

Joe adds, “The best things about doing BMX are making new friends and learning how to look after your bike, take care of it, take pride in it and make it look as good as possible.”

The exposure that BMX enjoyed at the Olympics has helped to convince councils in this area to support similar projects.

A new skate park has already been earmarked for Sidley Rec, and Jump Club is well on the way to raising £125,000 to bring the track up to the standard where it can stage competitive events and therefore start to generate revenue. Heart of Sidley is supporting the new plans for the refurbishment by giving £76,000 towards the scheme.

There is a tangible excitement about how BMX could reinvigorate this community. As Keith says, “You get two types of young people in Sidley. Those who can’t wait to leave here and the BMXers who can’t wait to move here.”

Half a mile away from Sidley Rec is the town’s other local sporting landmark. Or, at least it used to be.

Sidley Sports and Social Club (aka Gulliver’s, after the farmer who once owned the land) can be found through an alleyway behind a row of houses and a gap in a fence, just a matter of yards away from what used to be a thriving high street.

Currently, Gulliver's resembles an enormous overgrown garden where the grass hasn't been cut for six years. The frame of the main stand remains, but precious little else does. The clubhouse was destroyed by arsonists back in 2014, a year after Gulliver's went into administration, having previously been home to Sidley's football and cricket clubs.

Insolvency and business-recovery specialist Begbies Traynor was appointed to wind up the club. When the land was finally sold in 2015, it was hailed by Begbies as a deal to raise hopes that Gulliver's 'may once again become a pivotal site in the community.'

The reality was a different story.

Jay Carroll explains, "It's been a saga. Rother District Council offered to buy the land, but the administrator felt it didn't offer enough money. So, it was sold at auction. But because the land was categorised as a sports field, property developers paid far more than they should have done."

He adds, "There have been various meetings to find a happy compromise, but the developers need to make their money back.

"We looked at Rother District Council going down the compulsory purchase order route, and then Heart of Sidley would be able to work with local sports clubs to draw down some other funding through Sport England and lottery money to push the project forward."

November 5, 2018 was the deadline for the developers to raise an objection to that plan. With just 48 hours to go, an appeal was submitted, which means the future of Gulliver's hinges on the verdict of an independent planning inspector.

But it has now become a cause célèbre for the people of Sidley.

Jay explains, "We've set up a community interest company

(CIC), so if the inspector turns down the appeal we can move straight away. That subgroup includes local football clubs along with other local interests, and we've got support from the local MP, Huw Merriman.

"Heart of Sidley has done everything it can to make sure that land is protected for the community. Sidley is a place where people come out in their masses. People are proud to say they are born and bred here. I always worry, not about whether anyone will attend events or meetings but that we won't be able to cope with the numbers."

Reclaiming Gulliver's will allow the residents to shape the future of their home town.

As Jay concludes, "I think there is still a lot of expectation that a million pounds will transform the area, but over 10 years it isn't a lot.

"This is why people are focused on the Sports and Social Club. Because they feel if they can help to get that back up and running, it will be such a fantastic legacy to leave."



Trixie Winchester takes on the Bexhill BMX track



Rameses Meseorisa at an Olympia Boxing session, Chatham

Part Five

Arches Local, Chatham, Kent

"Why is it more important to be a winner here? It's because nobody expects us to win and everyone is expecting us to lose."

BOXING LESSONS FOR PEOPLE SUFFERING from Parkinson's disease sound like one of the most counterintuitive things you can possibly do for somebody living with that condition.

Yet there is a growing body of research which says that replicating elements of the training methods around movement and coordination can help to slow down the progression of Parkinson's and be of particular benefit for anyone in the early stages.

In 2017, St Mary's Amateur Boxing Club in Street End Road, Chatham, became one of the first gyms in the UK to start hosting these sessions, run by Olympia Boxing—a partner of Luton Arches Big Local.

The programme brought together people across a range of ages, all learning to cope with a disease for which there is no cure. It is just one of the many ways that boxing continues to

play a central role in this community.

Around 20 years ago, Channel 4 was home to ‘The Other Side’ — a series of short films broadcast some time after midnight, when the demographic tended to be students, stoners and insomniacs. No subject was too random, and stories could range from a profile of music impresario Malcolm McLaren to following a group of Scotsmen obsessed with a Class 37 diesel train. Really.

‘Chatham Jack: A Boxing Legend’ is one such film, which tells the story of Jack Edwards, a celebrated boxer who moved to Chatham in 1910 and coached a string of amateur champions. The Edwards family lived on The Brook, which is described in the film as one of the hardest and toughest areas in England. Chatham was a military town, The Brook was home to 30 pubs, and things tended to get a bit lively at chucking-out time.

It takes just 50 minutes to get to Chatham from London Victoria Station and it could be a prime spot of commuter-belt territory. Instead, Chatham is a hard sell for estate agents and still has a reputation for being a fighting town.

But Olympia Boxing and Luton Arches Big Local, along with council-run Medway Sport, have found more positive ways to promote pugilism.

On the day that I visit they are running another ground-breaking pilot scheme, called Boxfit—a seven-week programme designed to measure the impact of training sessions on a child’s mood and behaviour.

The sessions are run by Lewis Southgate, a 20-year-old national amateur bantamweight champion. He says, “Wayne Smith [Olympia Boxing Director] approached me to get involved with Olympia Boxing and Big Local. I thought to myself, ‘I get to train and coach boxing all day? That’s the

perfect job. Sweet as!’

“You can be very easily led into doing bad things here. Without boxing, I don’t know where I’d be right now. It could have been prison.”

There are around 60 carded boxers at St Mary’s, which means they’ve had medical clearance and are deemed fit to box competitively.

Lewis adds, “Without St Mary’s you wonder what those 60 boys and girls would be doing next. To see people dealing or doing drugs is normal. I’ve seen it since I was a kid.”

The boxing club has been going strong since the 1920s. In more recent times it was supported by a benevolent landlady who allowed St Mary’s to pay a peppercorn rent. But since she passed away in 2011, this local institution has been under constant threat of extinction.

Millennium Green is the proposed location for the new St Mary’s, which will become a multi-purpose facility. The Big Local area has committed £50,000 to a project that will cost around £250,000 in total, and also has support from Sport England and Medway Council.

Located just under a mile away from Big Local’s Luton Road office, Millennium Green had become the destination of choice for drug dealers, users and sex workers, while simultaneously turning into a no-go zone for everyone else. Between February 2017 and January 2018, there were 108 reported cases of violent and sexual crimes around this part of Chatham.

So, Big Local started a regeneration project to clear up the green, rid it of the disused needles, stop it from being overrun with fly tipping, and turn it into a community space. The project in itself was a success but also revealed another troubling aspect of life here.

Stephen Perez is the ex-chair of and current worker for Luton Arches Big Local. He explains, “Part of that project was to create a community bench and the kids would carve their pictures onto it. They would come into the park during the summer holidays and most of them were saying, ‘Can we have something to eat?’ We would say, ‘Haven’t you had any lunch?’

“We’d heard about holiday hunger but we hadn’t seen it for ourselves. The thing is, you get great contrasts here. You’re either obese or emaciated.”

So, while some kids are living on a diet of food served in cartons or boxes, for others, their only regular meal is a school meal.

Stephen adds, “At that point, I thought, we need to do something about this. Some of it is driven by poverty. But sometimes it isn’t about money. It can be chaotic lifestyles that impact on the kids. Also, how many takeaways have you seen here?”

It’s a rhetorical question, but within a half-mile stretch on Luton Road between two primary schools, you will find Topz Pizza, Cheers Pizza, Frydays Fish & Chips, Golden Curry, Tom’s Takeaway, The Gandhi Tandoori, New Favourites Chicken, Open Rice, Red Cow Carvery, Turkish Delight Kebab Shop and Original Best Kebab (which is probably neither ‘original’ nor ‘best’).

Now, those kids can take part in the Fit and Fed programme that runs during school holidays at the one primary school which has a playing field (if Kent is the garden of England, then this part of Chatham is more like the concrete jungle).

It means children can do a range of sports from football to archery, but also make new friends from other schools. Crucially, they are guaranteed to get at least one good meal a day.

As we talk to a succession of youngsters at Luton Junior School, what becomes clear is that, if Fit and Fed didn't exist, most would be stuck at home, playing computer games or watching TV and doing hardly any exercise.

Stephen also views sport as a chance to bring this community closer together.

After being diagnosed as diabetic and told he would never be able to play football again, Stephen shed 10 stone in 18 months and took up a coaching course. He now runs the Anchorians FC Kodiaks football team, which should be nicknamed the United Nations.

"I thought I would put together a team made up of kids from Big Local and whoever wanted to play, would get a game."

Around 50 per cent of all households here don't own a car. So, Stephen and Luton Arches Big Local organise the travel and provide help with kits and playing fees.

"The team is diverse. The area is diverse. We've got one boy from Mongolia, another one is from Slovakia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, India, Poland... I was speaking to one person recently who moaned that there are too many foreigners at the doctor's surgery and that sort of thing. But the football team is a great example of diversity working."

Stephen preaches a high-press game—he's the Jürgen Klopp of the Medway Messenger Under-10s League, if you will – and players have attracted the attention of professional clubs, including Crystal Palace.

"It isn't easy because we're asking them to work hard. From the beginning, I also wanted to ingrain the idea of being nice. The kids said, 'What? Even to the other team?' I said, 'Especially to the other team, because when you're not nice they will try harder [to win].'"

Even if the kids questioned the method, they couldn't question the results.

"Before Christmas, we were struggling. Three or four of the boys are from single-parent families. So, one parent might take them to a game, the other might not.

"Having lost 11-0 to a team before Christmas, we didn't lose another game, we played that same team in the MMYL Cup final and won 3-1.

"But 70% of this team wouldn't be playing football if it wasn't for Big Local. On the one hand, it's great we're able to do this. But it raises the wider question, about why are these kids not able to play football without us?

"Our schools aren't the greatest, we've got problems with drug dealing and dependencies. We've one school field for three primary schools. We can't afford to access secondary schools, and they don't want us there anyway."

Then Stephen says something that sticks with me, about how kids from areas like Luton Road are judged, and why sport, even if only for a moment in time, gives them a chance to level the playing field.

"Why is it more important to be a winner here?" he says. "It's because nobody expects us to win and everyone is expecting us to lose."



Riley Stocker and Rameses Meseorisa at an Anchorians FC Kodiaks training session



The Portland Inn Project, Stoke-on-Trent

CONCLUSION

THROUGHOUT THIS TOUR OF WHAT COULD BE CALLED England's alternative sporting heartlands, whenever I asked a child, 'What is the best thing about doing sport?', the immediate response was almost always the same: 'Making new friends.'

Another consistent theme, echoed by the adults, was that kids simply don't play as much sport as they themselves did at a similar age. This observation was usually followed by a hand gesture to imply that those children spend all their spare time playing computer games.

But sometimes that's because there isn't another option. Until Barrow Island Big Local took over Cav Park, kids would be indoors playing whatever version of FIFA on a PlayStation because they were not allowed to play the real thing on a pitch just a few yards away.

There is still an ongoing debate about what exactly the London Games achieved beyond the event itself, because simply inspiring people to do sport is worthless if they've got nowhere to play.

In an interview with Director Magazine from 2010, Seb Coe said that creating a lasting legacy out of the Olympics would be by far the biggest challenge.

“It is not about the project management, because smart people work these things out; it is not raising money, because we are doing that very well; and it is not the challenge of building great teams.

“I think we all understand that a large part of the assessment of this is going to be what we leave behind. The softer legacies are always harder to achieve.”

Those softer legacies can be playing football once a week or taking a bike ride or simply making friends.

And Big Local has enjoyed success in creating such legacies, because the people involved have a deeper understanding of the needs and deficiencies within their towns and villages.

As East Cleveland resident Paula Miller says, “If investment came into these villages, I think people would be surprised by what could be achieved.”

In some respects, the hard work begins now, as each of those communities will eventually have to learn how to exist on their own without Big Local’s financial support.

But in every case, what people in those communities have learned is how things work, the confidence to ask the right questions, and—to use the vernacular—‘how you get shit done.’

And they don’t have to look on from the sidelines, like some sort of frustrated touchline Dad, thinking, “We could have done a better job if only they gave us the chance.”

“Why is it more important to be a winner here? It’s because nobody expects us to win and everyone is expecting us to lose... Kids from areas like Luton Road are judged, but sport, even if only for a moment in time, gives them a chance to level the playing field.”

Across England, 150 communities are using £1 million each to make their area a better place to live. They are part of Big Local, a resident-led programme of local transformation, described as ‘perhaps the most important and ambitious experiment in community development ever undertaken in the UK’.

In recent years, community sport has ranked low on the agendas of national and local government. Yet many Big Local areas are choosing to prioritise sport when allocating their funds. The short-term benefits are easy to see; but dig a little deeper and the impacts can be far-reaching. In this essay, journalist Ryan Herman visits five Big Local areas where sport is helping communities to transcend physical, social and political boundaries and tackle some of their biggest underlying challenges.

This essay is one of a series exploring how people and places are changing through Big Local. Each essay considers the lessons of Big Local for institutions and policymakers interested in radical devolution of power and responsibility to a community level.



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ISBN 978-1-9998292-7-8



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