



PRIDE IN PLACE

LED BY YOU – BACKED BY UK GOVERNMENT

Workshop facilitators



Cathy Varley (Investing in community buildings)

Cathy has over 15 years of experience working with voluntary community organisations and has been the Locality Senior Development Officer based in the North West of England since January 2020. She has delivered programmes for a wide variety of funders from the private, public and third sectors. Cathy has worked on several community asset-focused programmes, including the MHCLG-funded Community Ownership Fund support programme, working with at-risk assets across the North West, Local Trusts Incorporation and Assets support for Big Local groups across the North West and with Kirklees Council on their Community Asset Transfer support programme. She also delivers workshops on asset management and fundraising for Locality members.



Alison Berwick (Investing in community buildings)

Alison leads the Locality Central and North team and is based in the East Midlands. She has 30 years' experience in the voluntary and charity sector. She has a strong focus on heritage, arts and culture, place-based initiatives, as well as blue and green and high street regeneration. These have ranged from small volunteer-led community groups to local authority multimillion-dollar regeneration projects. She has a wide range of experience around assets and also worked on the MHCLG's Community Ownership Project. Experience includes options appraisals, feasibility studies, master planning, business planning, business support, governance and finance, community engagement, project development, volunteering, capacity building and mentoring, developing and delivering training, monitoring and evaluation. Alison specialised in funding for projects and is also a community shares practitioner.



Simon Borkin (Investing in community buildings)



Simon rejoined the Stretford Public Hall Board in June 2017 following an interim role as Project Organiser to manage the ballroom transformation. In this role, he co-ordinated the Hall's community share offer to raise the finance needed for the construction work. As a Board member, Simon leads on membership relations and IT. Having previously worked for Co-ops UK, he is now a freelance consultant, practitioner and researcher with a rich background in supporting co-operative and community enterprises to start, grow and contribute to a sustainable and inclusive economy.

Jon Hutchison (Meaningful resident leadership in decision making about resources)



Jon Hutchinson is the Programme Director for Communities having worked at Groundwork since 2010.

Jon has strategic control of Groundwork's Community Programme delivering projects under the core themes of Affordable Warmth, Blue Green Economy, Circular Economy, Connecting Communities with Greenspace, Health and Wellbeing and Heritage.

Jon is passionate about supporting the development of sustainable communities where individuals and the environment are given opportunities to flourish. You can find Jon on Twitter: @jonhutchinson0 and on LinkedIn

Nikki Gascoigne (Meaningful resident leadership in decision making about resources)

Nikki was the chair of Windmill Hill Big Local in Runcorn and is a community leader. She moved to Windmill Hill in 2000 and later became involved in local community activity through St Bert's Church and Windmill Hill Big Local. Nikki began volunteering with Windmill Hill Big Local and became involved in efforts to save and redevelop St Bert's as a community space. As chair, Nikki played a key role in transforming St Bert's into a thriving community hub. The space now hosts a wide range of activities, including youth groups, dance classes and local meetings, and has become an important focal point for the area. Through her involvement with Big Local, Nikki has helped strengthen connections between residents and support positive change in the neighbourhood.



Helen Morton (Meaningful resident leadership in decision making about resources)



Helen is an experienced programme and grants manager who has worked across the charity and community development sectors. Before joining Local Trust, Helen worked in various UK-wide and international grant-making and compliance roles for BBC Children in Need, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award. She has led programmes, managed complex grant portfolios, and enjoys building strong supportive relationships with those delivering work on the ground. She is passionate about empowering people to deliver lasting social impact in their communities.

Eve Mellor (Supporting wider community involvement in plans and decisions)



An experienced community organiser, based in Birkenhead, and Trust Manager of North Birkenhead Development Trust, a local charity running a busy community centre. The trust focuses on community development and organising, with a particular emphasis on food insecurity, and supporting families and the local community to affect change through accessible, place-based support.

Nick Gardham (Supporting wider community involvement in plans and decisions)



Nick is Co-Founder of the Centre for Participation and Action and CEO of Community Organisers. Over the last 15 years Nick has led and supported the training of 1000s of people in community organising since 2015 as well as working with Government, Public Bodies, Trusts and Foundations and Voluntary Sector Organisations to design and deliver programmes that deliver meaningful participation and engagement.

He began his career as a Teach First teacher before moving into direct community work which saw him working on the ground in many communities across the UK and Europe. Nick has secured millions in funding for community organising and asset-based approaches.

Through his work Nick has led supported the development of several national campaigns including the #OperationWifi campaign and the Cost-of-Living Alliance that have united the network at community



Alongside Nick's work on the ground he has served as an advisor to various Government departments, Trusts and Community Foundations. Most recently, Nick serves as a co-convenor of the Humanity Project. A national movement to seed 'assembly culture' into neighbourhoods bringing 1000s of people together to listen, deliberate, decide together the future of their places.

Liam Kelly (Building strong partnerships)



Liam is a social entrepreneur who co-founded Make CIC where he is now CEO. Make is a socially trading organisation based across the Liverpool City Region with the mission is to help people turn their passions into prosperity through a collection of creative-focused workspaces, access to community assets, and supporting communities. Additionally, Liam holds a role as a non-executive director of the registered housing provider Magenta Living. Magenta houses more than 10% of Wirral's population and is one of the borough's largest employers.

Nick Plumb (Building strong partnerships)



Nick leads Power to Change's think-do work on community renewal, shaping the research, policy and storytelling that help communities build power through community business. He designs and delivers mixed-methods programmes—combining participatory insight with practical testing in place—then translates what works into policy ideas, narratives and coalitions that can shift how institutions invest in communities.

Over the past decade Nick has worked across local economics, cohesion, climate, immigration, democratic reform and devolution, with a consistent focus on how places rebuild resilience, belonging and opportunity. At Power to Change he built the organisation's policy and advocacy function and later brought together policy, research and communications to strengthen external influence. He also served on the Board of the Government's High Streets Task Force, contributing to national thinking on high street renewal and place-based regeneration.



Laura Fisher (Practical approaches to measuring success)



Laura has worked in Local Trust's research team since summer 2019. She led on the Measuring Change support offer which matched evaluation specialists with Big Local partnerships and plays a key role in gathering the achievements and learning from Big Local areas as part of the Learning from Big Local project.

Before joining Local Trust, Laura worked at London Youth, a membership and advocacy organisation for youth organisations across London. Here, she was involved in programme evaluation and a variety of research projects, including a report on young people and communities

Jack Loughnane (Practical approaches to measuring success)



Jack has worked at Local Trust since August 2023 as a senior researcher. He leads on a range of projects including the Partnership Reviews and Partnership Member Surveys. Jack's background is in social psychology. Before joining Local Trust, Jack completed his PhD in the University of Limerick, Ireland which was funded by the Irish Research Council. His research utilises advanced quantitative research methods and he has previously taught analysis and research methods at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Sally Yeoman (Providing the support infrastructure)



In August 2006 Sally was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer at St Helens CVS, following a number of years running the same organisation in Epping Forest in Essex.

Sally has experience of working across a range of sectors and organisations with officers, members and stakeholders at all levels. Sally now leads the merged local infrastructure organisation Halton and St Helens Voluntary & Community Action. Halton and St Helens VCA is the local support and development organisation providing advice, information, support and practical services to charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises in St Helens and Halton. Offering such support to help create a strong local civil society sector that makes a positive difference in the lives of local people and communities. Since merger VCA is connected with more than 2500 groups, charities and organisation in the 2 Boroughs.



Alongside having overall responsibility for the running of the organisation, Sally's key role is to undertake the influence and voice functions on behalf of the local sector and works with partners to achieve this. Alongside this she spent 11 years as a Non-Executive Director on an NHS Community Foundation Trust.

Sally is currently the Chair of Voluntary Sector NW, Vice-Chair of VS6 the Liverpool City Region VCSE sector partnership and a Non-Executive Director at Halton Housing. She is an Institute of Directors (IOD) certified Company Director. Sally was awarded an MBE in the 2022 Queen's Jubilee Honours List for services to the community in Halton & St Helens.

Rachel Vernelle (Setting up and making plans)

Rachel brings over 30 years of experience in community involvement and empowerment. Her career has focused on supporting community-led, public, and housing organisations through the delivery of tailored support, management, and training services.

Enabling communities to lead decision-making and shape delivery across a wide range of place-based programmes has been central to all of Rachel's professional work. She has extensive experience supporting Big Local Partnerships across the North of England.

At the outset of the Big Local programme, she played a key role in developing initial plans and partnerships for five Big Local areas.

She later worked directly with two areas to support the early transition of their plans into delivery and went on to serve as a Big Local Representative for five years, supporting three areas through to the successful completion of their programmes.

Debbie Stephens (Setting up and making plans)

Debbie Stephens has been CEO of Fun 4 Kids and the L30 Community Centre for 24 years and considers it a privilege to be alongside the community and to lead a space that welcomes the whole community. The Centre hosts a wide range of activities, but at its heart is Asset Based Community Development—bringing people together to build relationships and share skills. As a partnership member of L30's Million from day one, Debbie has played a strategic role in embedding ABCD into the programme, shaping its direction and supporting the Community Builder role, including employing and mentoring Emma Anker.



Emma Anker (Setting up and making plans)

Emma Anker is Netherton through and through. Having lived there all her life, she is the person everyone knows—and trusts. For years, Emma has naturally looked out for her neighbours, making her the perfect fit for the Community Builder role with L30's Million. Emma's work is rooted in connection: she brings together residents, community assets, local groups, organisations and statutory services to ensure that positive change is led by the community itself. Rather than fixing problems or taking charge, Emma works alongside people — encouraging, motivating and creating safe spaces where individuals and groups can grow in confidence and capacity. Through strong one-to-one relationships, inclusive approaches and shared experiences, Emma has helped strengthen belonging, improve wellbeing and support a neighbourhood people feel proud to call home.

Dan Crowe (Building strong partnerships)



Dan is director of 3ni, a new social value partnership, recently spun-out from Local Trust. 3ni brings together policy, practice, and the latest research and cutting-edge data and diagnostic tools to support local government and public sector partners to work with disadvantaged communities to transform neighbourhoods across the country. It also hosts the national network for neighbourhood improvement, sharing best and next practice to support community-led regeneration.

He incubated 3ni at Local Trust, where he previously led the policy team, in particular on the work and research programme for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, advocating for a Community Wealth Fund, and making the case for C4, the ESRC-funded Centre for Collaboration in Community Connectedness. Dan has a background in local and regional government, working for the elected Mayors of London and in the north east of England, in regeneration policy at the Homes and Communities Agency, and for the think tanks Localis, New Europe, The Young Foundation, and Collaborate. He has been an elected leader in the British co-operative movement, serving as Vice-President of the Co-operative Group where he led on the creation of its community strategy and as a trustee of the Co-operative Foundation. He is a Fellow of the RSA.



Claire Burnham (Building strong partnerships)



Claire is the Assistant Director, Neighbourhood Reform and Skills and is passionate about ensuring that all residents in our borough, whatever their background, are given the opportunity to reach their aspirations.

She has 25 years' experience working for Wigan Council across a variety of roles, working with children, families, communities and businesses, both as a front-line practitioner and as an operational and strategic leader. As a qualified Social Worker, Claire is committed to ensuring that the skills delivery in the borough tackles inequalities head on and provides pathways into employment, building resilience and better health outcomes and supporting people to live happy and healthy lives. To this aim she is also dedicated to working alongside residents, communities and VCFSE partners to ensure that we recognise and build on the strengths that already exist in our neighbourhoods, whilst also inviting in partners and services who can work alongside them.

Kate Whitmarsh (Building strong partnerships)



Kate has been The Centre Development Officer for over a decade. From finance to fundraising, business planning to project management, her arsenal of skills has been vital in shaping The Centre's journey. Committed to empowering communities, Kate is a passionate advocate for long term community investment with residents holding the purse strings.

The Centre West Cumbria is a charity that provides social and creative opportunities for people to connect and grow. Based at The Centre, a community building in Ewanrigg, Maryport, we deliver an annual programme of events and activities for all ages, working with other organisations to reduce isolation and empower residents. Kate has been The Centre Development Officer for over a decade. From finance to fundraising, business planning to project management, her arsenal of skills has been vital in shaping The Centre's journey. Committed to empowering communities, Kate is a passionate advocate for long term community investment with residents holding the purse strings.

Alex Boys (Looking ahead: legacy in 2036 and beyond)



Alex has over 20 years' experience of supporting resident-led action and community empowerment. Joining Local Trust in 2024, he leads our Delivery Team, with responsibility for delivery of the Big Local programme, our grant funding process and support offer.



In previous roles, Alex supported development of the Big Local programme at the National Lottery Community Fund and led a local infrastructure organisation in the West Midlands, providing support to resident-led partnerships and community organisations.

Prior to joining Local Trust, Alex held the position of Deputy CEO of NAVCA, the national body for local VCSE infrastructure organisations, where he played a key national role in developing the quality of local community sector support, and building voluntary sector engagement in new health and care structures. He is a trustee of Black Country Together, a charity supporting community and public sector collaboration.



Claire Standish (Looking ahead legacy in 2036 and beyond)

Clare has worked for Our Sale West (OSW) since 2015 when it began as a Big Local. Through this time she has worked closely with residents and their resident panel to create a programme of works and deliver projects on their behalf. Our Sale West has been identified as a successful example of resident led action and is now a Community Incorporated Organisation (CIO).



Stephanie Draper (Inclusive partnership and decision making)

Stephanie is Acting CEO of Involve, a charity working to make public participation an everyday part of our democracy and help solve the big challenges of our time. She has over 20 years experience working on complex projects, bringing people together, to deliver sustainability and equity. She is skilled in participation and deliberation and has spent much of her career designing, innovating and delivering participatory change processes with the public and other actors. She advises many organisations on public engagement and works extensively to deliver impact engagements on a range of issues. She is a member of the DESNZ Public Engagement Working Group.

She joined Involve from Bond - the membership body for the UK's international development agencies where she was their CEO. She was previously Deputy CEO and Chief Change Officer at Forum for the Future. She is dedicated to improving our democracy, ensuring that people are able to shape the decisions that affect them and creating a just and sustainable future. She oversaw Bond's work on protecting civic space and democracy in the UK and around the world. She founded and chaired the Sustainable Shipping Initiative and is Chair of