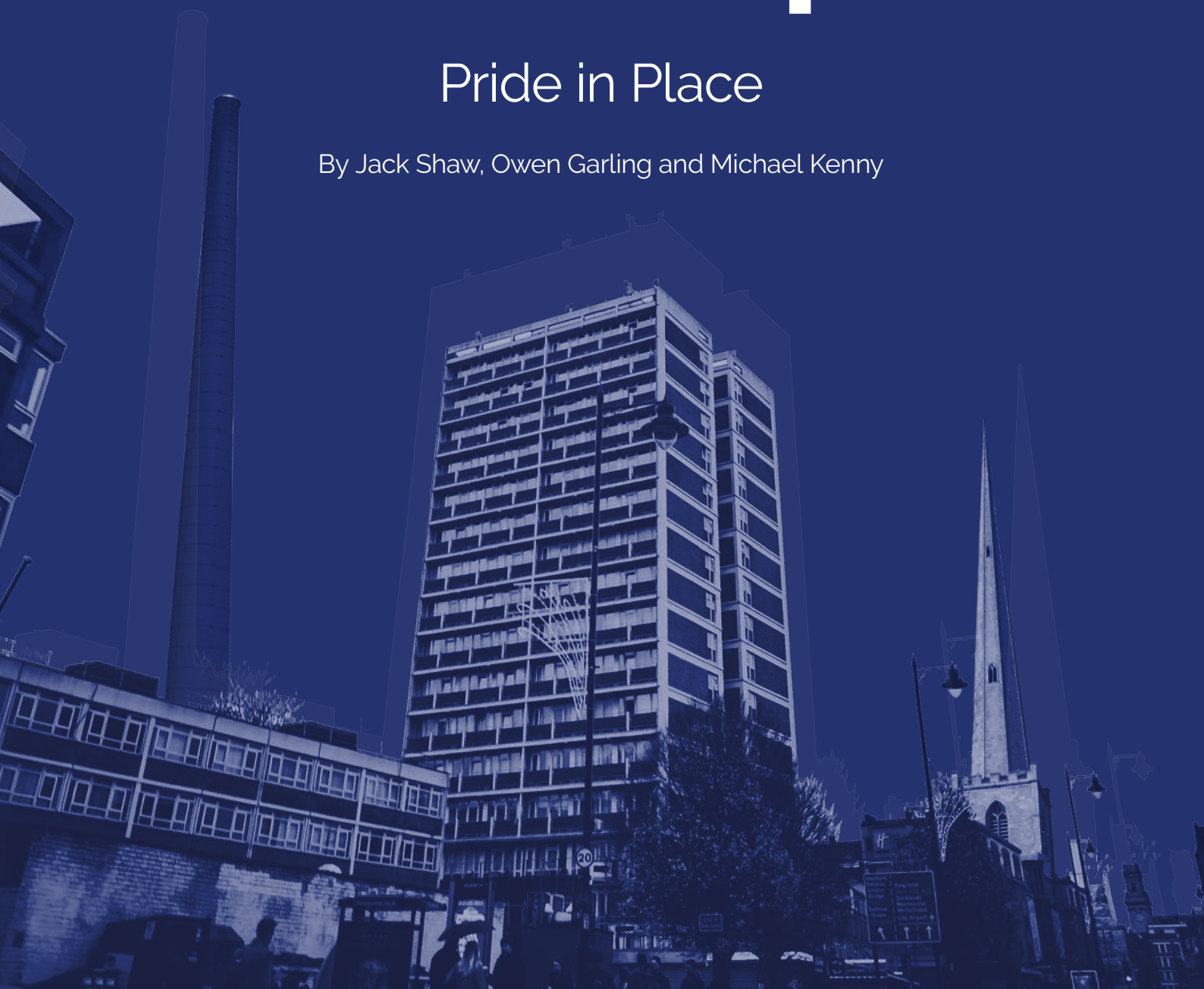**Policy Report Series**

Townscapes

Pride in Place

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Preface[1]

The declining economic fortunes of many towns, and the chasm that divides the experiences and outlooks of many of their inhabitants from the metropolitan centres where wealth and power have become concentrated, are issues of growing interest in political life and public policy. In the United Kingdom (UK), majority support for Brexit among town-dwellers, and the countervailing values of many young urbanites, have sparked a deep debate about how and why towns are locked out of the circuits of growth in the modern economy, and how the inequalities associated with economic geography can be more effectively tackled.

The Townscapes series at the Bennett Institute for Public Policy brings together a variety of different data sources to offer a deeper analysis of how towns are faring across the regions and nations of Great Britain. It aims to step away from the oversimplification and dogma that features in much of the contemporary policy debate, offering instead a more finely grained picture of how different towns relate to their wider regions and nations, as well as their nearest cities. It demonstrates the merits of a more granular and regionally rooted perspective for the understanding of geographical inequalities and the kinds of policy needed to address them. In our Townscapes reports, we argue that policymakers need to consider multiple town categorisations, to get beneath the generalisations that have become so dominant in this debate such as 'university', 'coastal', or 'post-industrial' towns.

These reports dispel some of the persistent myths about towns and their fortunes since the financial crisis of 2007/08 and lead us towards a better appreciation of the very different circumstances and factors which affect the lives and opportunities of those who live in them.

In this report, we examine two of the most important ideas that emerged in the UK Government's Levelling Up White Paper, published in early 2022, as well as in the wider debate: specifically, the idea that in many left-behind towns and communities there is a diminishing sense of local pride, and the contention that tackling this deficit is integral to the challenge of improving the social and economic prospects of these places.

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Executive Summary

There is a growing chorus of voices in the policymaking world, as well as within the academic community, arguing that 'place' should be much more integral to the design and delivery of public policy, and that the spatial dimensions of economic and social inequality have been neglected for too long.

At an international level, this idea can be traced back to various sources, including some of the thinking set out by the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the 1990s. The former argued for the economic integration of 'leading and lagging' places through the provision of 'spatially blind' services such as education, health and water and sanitation, coupled with investments in 'spatially connective' infrastructure including roads, railways, airports, harbours and communication systems (World Bank, 2009). The latter called for a 'place-based' approach to economic development and the adoption of policies designed to provide social goods tailored to the needs of specific communities and struggling places. (McCann, 2021).

In the UK, the debate about place has gathered momentum following the Brexit vote in 2016, and the importance of 'Red Wall' seats in the Midlands and the North of England to the electoral success of the Conservative Party in 2019. There is also a growing body of academic research that has highlighted the predicament of 'left behind' places and 'the places that don't matter' (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Martin et al, 2021). And there is much debate about the nature of the economic processes and policy prescriptions that are generating this pattern of increasingly uneven development between urban growth poles on the one hand, and post-industrial, coastal towns and rural hinterlands on the other.

In the UK context, the publication of the long-awaited Levelling Up White Paper published in February of this year signals the growing importance and influence of this focus. It sets out a wide-ranging, cross-governmental policy framework designed to address some of the causes and manifestations of spatial disparities in the UK. The policies it advances reflect the recognition that there is no single policy template that can be applied to all places. It advocates a place-based approach and highlights the continuing importance of place-blind policies designed to tackle inequalities of outcome, in areas like education and health.

The White Paper also insists that these disparities are not just the result of years of underinvestment and inattention by government. It argues that communities in left-behind places also suffer from a loss or erosion of their identity, traditions and local pride as a result of long-term decline in their economic prospects. This idea is linked to the suggestion that questions of pride and community spirit have been neglected in previous government attempts to rebalance the economy more specifically. The White Paper contends that place matters to people, and in different ways, and that policymakers should be interested in the cultural and affective dimensions of the relationship people have with the places they live, and that improvements in this respect can have important implications for the social fabric and economic prospects of places. In making this argument, its authors connect

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to a much wider current of academic and policy research which has for some while argued against purely economic approaches to understanding and tackling social inequalities.

These arguments coalesce within the White Paper around an assertion of the importance of 'pride in place'. This forms one of the four overarching themes that are identified within the policy framework it advances and is also one of the 12 core missions which it urges government to take forward, and are currently enshrined in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill making its way through Parliament. As this paper will make clear, this focus is not unique to the UK.

The emphasis placed on emotional attachments to the places that we live and the pride we express in them, as well as their alleged decline in many left-behind places, is not novel, although the political context after Brexit has made them more urgent and salient for policymakers in the UK. But the importance placed on relationships between people and places and the implicit suggestion that government should tailor its interventions to address this alleged deficit of pride in place does reflect a new kind of understanding and associated policy objective. And this is not confined to the Conservative wing of politics: Labour's Shadow Levelling Up Secretary, Lisa Nandy MP recently outlined the need for culture, identity and history – constitutive elements of pride in place – to be "reflected in the national story" (Chorley, 2022).

Critics argue that rather than focusing on questions about identity and culture, government should prioritise addressing the underlying causes of the economic challenge which poorer towns and left-behind communities face. As the Institute for Government recently noted, "the attractiveness of different places to live often depends on economic success" (Institute for Government, 2022). Based on this view, it is economic fortunes that provide the drivers for, and agents of, feelings of satisfaction and optimism about a place. Such a stance underpins some of the scepticism which has been expressed about the pride in place agenda being promoted by the UK Government, which is often dismissed as proposing cosmetic interventions, such as adding a few hanging baskets to a high street or tackling graffiti, rather than addressing the underlying economic challenges of poorer places.

Having conducted a review of the existing literature, we take issue with this position and draw attention to the various kinds of evidence which suggest that pride in place is linked to, and can be a source of, some of the other 'goods' and values that policymakers believe important to promote – such as community cohesion and social capital. Pride matters because enhanced feelings of optimism about and connection to a place can contribute to the conditions in which economic growth is more likely to happen.

This report examines various kinds of evidence and research relating to these issues and scours a number of different academic fields of enquiry to shed light on the elusive nature of pride in communities. One early discovery in the course of this research was that there is no single academic

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field or sub-field where reflection on this issue is gathered. The issues associated with this topic cut across conventional fields of enquiry. We have accordingly looked to different disciplines to draw together theoretical and empirical insights into the character of, and dynamics affecting, people's feelings about the places they inhabit, and the potential benefits that may arise, from a policy perspective, of enhancing local residents' feelings of pride in place. But we also raise a number of questions about what precisely pride is in this context and how it might best be defined; and we argue that policymakers need to understand better the profound challenges associated with its measurement. We set out a range of different suggestions for how a more nuanced approach to measurement might be developed. We also draw attention to a number of recent policy initiatives which provide useful examples of both successful

and unsuccessful attempts by government and a wider spectrum of actors in the UK, and elsewhere, to deliver policies designed to regenerate or protect at risk or left-behind places, which have had a commitment to enhancing feelings of pride and of place at their core.

The report offers a particular challenge to the idea, which is integral to the analysis offered in the Levelling Up White Paper, that a sense of pride has been diminishing in many poorer areas, towns and communities in recent times – and now needs to be 'restored'. We suggest that this is an inaccurate and oversimplified way of thinking about place-based identities in left-behind places. There is a good deal of evidence which indicates that some of the places with high levels of local pride are among the more deprived areas in the country, while others are located in localities where economic conditions are improving.

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'Pride in place'

The term 'pride in place' is a relatively new invention in British political rhetoric. It figured in the Prime Minister's speech on levelling up in July 2021, when he talked about 'restoring pride in place' as one of the central planks of his vision for creating a more balanced economy (Prime Minister's Office, 2021). It is one of a family of similar phrases, such as 'local' and 'civic' pride, which have come to prominence in recent years.

Why pride?

While the idea that place should be more integral to public policy has, as suggested above, become a recurrent theme in the public discourse during the last few decades, the idea of restoring or boosting feelings of pride in relation to local communities is a less familiar one. The concept of pride has a long and chequered history in western cultural life. In recent years, the term has been adopted in the realm of politics by minority groups insisting upon the value of their own collective identity and objecting to the ways in which they are represented and marginalised by mainstream culture, as for instance with the notion of gay pride. This connotation shares similarities with the contemporary discourse of pride in place, which is closely associated with poorer communities and left-behind areas, and the implicit suggestion that the pride that many people feel in their areas is not reflected within the dominant culture and not appreciated by decision-makers. The accuracy of this characterisation of people's feelings of 'place-identity' in left-behind towns is a theme we will consider within this report.

Understanding place-based identities

There has been a notable turn in the policy world in recent years to recognise the importance and meaning of place, and a particular concern about the fate of post-industrial cities and regions, poorer towns and deprived communities has emerged. A growing body of economic analysis has examined the phenomenon of left-behind places across many different countries, including 'La France périphérique' (peripheral France), 'abgehängte Regine' (suspended regions) in Germany, 'Aree Interne' (inner areas) in Italy, 'Krimpgebieden' (shrinking areas) in the Netherlands, 'la España vaciada' (the hollowed-out Spain), and 'legacy cities' and the 'rustbelt' in the United States (Martin et al, 2021).

But why exactly should people's feelings about the place in which they live, and the geographically formed identities that they possess, matter to government? The White Paper is insistent that a community's feelings about its place of residence are an important and overlooked barometer of its fortunes, and they may also be a contributor to its social and economic prospects. This is an assertion that we consider in more depth below. While understanding how a local community feels about its area is an important part of the body of knowledge that central and local government need to compile if they are contemplating interventions in a place, the question of why exactly governing authorities should see these subjective feelings as important is complex and contested. And there is in government an alternative view which sees the real source of inequalities and disadvantage in terms of material economic factors such as transport and digital

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connectivity, and which holds little interest in subjective identities and community feelings. Our own argument throughout this paper is that any government that is serious about addressing issues of spatial inequality in the UK should take questions of community, culture and place-identity seriously insofar as these are likely to contribute to some of the other social goods that it cares about – like social capital, community resilience or inclusion. And there is evidence, we will argue, to indicate that some forms of place-based identity do operate in this way. To the extent that feelings about a place can enhance or inhibit these values, civic pride should indeed matter to government at all levels, national and local. But these relationships need fuller empirical investigation, and more work needs to be undertaken to define how pride works in geographical terms, and to understand its dynamics and relationships to other social values.

There is an extensive body of evidence suggesting that communities which enjoy a strong sense of connection with their place and are broadly optimistic about its prospects are more likely to generate higher levels of local participation in civil society and have higher rates of volunteering in them. And, more generally, there are also indications in some studies of important relationships between place-identity and levels of trust, wellbeing and social capital. People living in these communities are also likely to witness lower levels of isolation, ill-health and dependency on welfare (Putman, 2000; Onward, 2020; Peng et al, 2020; The National Lottery Community Fund, 2021).

More generally, there is a growing recognition – in politics and wider society – that where we spend our early years is a constitutive element in our sense of who we are and an important source of personal values and civic identity, and that this is even more so for people who spend a large portion of their life in the place where they grow up. But there is no clear consensus about the geographical scale at which a sense of place-identity is likely to be most meaningful. Place is used in the research literature to refer to estates, neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities, regions, and indeed nations.

A great variety of national and international studies have explored what it is about a place that makes people identify with it, and a wide range of answers supplied to this question. There is a focus in this disparate literature on the importance of the built environment, and buildings and landscapes associated with the heritage of a place, feelings about personal safety and crime, as well as the quality and value of community amenities such as high streets, the local pub and sports and green spaces in shaping people's sense of place (Saleh, 1998; Peng et al, 2020). A good deal of research explores how a sense of the history of a locality is integral to understandings of its character and worth (Lewicka, 2008).

This disparate literature also provides insights into those developments that people tend to see as most damaging to their place's prospects and sense of identity. These include the perceptions that high streets are run down, that anti-social behaviour and crime are rising, that public spaces are not safe or cared for, and that public authorities

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– either locally or nationally – are often disposed to pursue policies that are felt to be damaging to its character and infrastructure (Dredge and Jenkins, 2003; Peng et al, 2020; More in Common, 2022; Power to Change, 2022).

These themes aside, what is most striking about these studies is the variety of different definitions and understandings of place employed by those researching these issues, and the multiplicity of ways in which people define their own loyalty to the places that they live. For policymakers contemplating interventions that aim to boost positive attitudes about a place, this means it is highly unlikely that a one-size-fits-all approach will work in this policy area. There is instead an abiding need for policymakers to understand places in their full richness, to understand the distinctive sources of pride in different areas, and to tailor interventions accordingly. The notion of a place-rooted identity is one that many researchers have found useful and meaningful, allowing analysts to dig deeply into "the look *and* the feel of a place" (Heritage Lottery Fund, 2015; Martin et al, 2021).

One of the most seminal theorical treatments of this idea can be found in the work of environmental psychologist Harold M. Proshansky who coined the term 'place-identity' in an influential study in 1978, defining it as:

"...those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioural tendencies relevant to a specific environment."

(Proshansky, 1978)

Others have conceptualised place-identity in similar terms. Geographer Anssi Paasi describes place as closely related to "an individual's biography or life history" in contrast to other constructs, such as regional identities, which emanate from institutionally defined geographies. Elsewhere it has been described loosely as a "shared identity", or in more vernacular terms, as what it means to be 'Bradfordian' or 'Liverpudlian' (Wood, 2006; Paasi, 2022).

Unlike social identity theory, which in some respects overlooks the geographical dimension of identity, Proshansky conceptualised place as one of the domains in which identity was formed, and he accorded it equal standing to other key markers, such as gender, ethnicity, or class (Hauge, 2007). The contemporary return to the geographical dimension of identity renders his thinking of interest. So too does his important, and challenging, observation that feelings of place-identity will often become salient when people feel that the place that they live is under threat.

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Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory seeks to understand how people define who they are in relation to social groups. It argues that the creation of group identities "involves both the categorisation of one's 'in-group' with regard to an 'out-group' and the tendency to view one's own group with a positive bias vis-à-vis the out-group." (Encyclopaedia of Critical Psychology, 2014)

Place is not seen as an identity category in its own right by Social Identity theorists; rather it is seen as a contributory factor to layers of an individual's identity such as class or race (Bernardo and Palma-Oliveira, 2013).

More recent empirical research has also stressed that a sense of place is integral to the values and social outlooks of communities based outside the UK's largest cities (Goodhart, 2017; Jennings and Stoker, 2018). And some studies conceptualise these features of place-identity in terms of the meanings and values it affords individuals (Paasi, 2001; Peng et al, 2020). Other research draws attention to the ways in which individuals and groups construct places through different narratives and discourses (Lewicka, 2005). Pride is only one of the emotions which this literature stresses in relation to feelings of place. Other more familiar notions include feelings of connection or disconnection, belonging or alienation, and detachment (being 'displaced' or feeling a sense of 'placelessness').

A number of pertinent lessons and insights figure in this literature which are particularly relevant to those interested in understanding the relationships between place-identity and public policy.

The built environment figures prominently in much of this research. There are numerous studies that focus upon spaces where communities come together, amenities are provided and heritage is celebrated (Putman, 2000; Klinenberg, 2020). Some studies dissect the different kinds of place-related meaning which are conveyed and created in relation to these sites, and these are interpreted in relation to wider concepts like local culture or tradition. Within the literature, there is focus on questions such as who is deemed to belong within established views of local culture and community, which groups are seen as most central to these, and what forms of collective and individual agency are contingent upon people's feeling of rootedness in different places. And various studies explore the mechanisms by which feelings of belonging are created (Peng et al, 2020).

It is widely suggested that **local places** are the primary site where a sense of shared value and social purpose for individuals and groups, as well as feelings of self-worth and

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agency, are generated (Peng et al, 2020). And some link the development of these goods to the cultivation of democratic citizenship (Gastil and Xenos, 2010; Local Trust, 2019).

One of the key normative claims in this multifaceted literature is that the integral relationship between feelings of place and people's sense of self is neglected or overlooked by much conventional social analysis. And the contention that place-based policy should extend beyond a conventional focus on economic regeneration chimes with recent arguments in policy circles, requiring a broader approach to tackling spatial inequalities that gives "citizens and their communities the power and resources to shape their places and to meet the needs of their members" (Onward, 2021).

There are a number of studies which demonstrate that it is the **people who inhabit a place** who are the key agents in shaping its character, boundaries and defining features. This view implicitly challenges more deterministic notions of the causal impact of place on people's outlooks. Without people in them, places are little more than empty spaces. This two-directional interaction between the physical and lived environments and local communities often determines the character, intensity and meanings of place-identity (Proshansky et al, 1983; Peng et al, 2020).

How people feel about a place is integrally bound up with feelings about its past and prospects for the future too (Lewicka, 2005; Lewicka, 2008; Elledge, 2022). Indeed, some research highlights how **feelings about the past** – often framed in nostalgic terms – are employed as yardsticks against which a perceived decline in the present is judged.

Other researchers have explored the role that **heritage assets** – museums, historic buildings, statues – play in providing resources for narratives about the past (and present) identity of a place (Public First, 2022). And some have illustrated how improvements in the built environment can also convey a sense that the fortunes of a place are 'on the up' – regardless of whether that is the case objectively. Just as a sense of the historical past can sustain positive feelings and narratives in the present, a sense of the future prospects of a place can shape feelings about its present state, and re-evaluations of the past. Abandoned sites scattered across post-industrial landscapes are a case in point. As powerful symbols of lost former glories, they can undermine current feelings about its fortunes. Yet on the other hand, some accounts stress that continuity with a strong sense of pride in the past can provide physical and ontological security (Rogaly and Taylor, 2006; Twigger-Ross and the Office for Science, 2013). And there are studies which use this concept to suggest that when change in a place feels too fast or uncontrollable, powerful feelings of insecurity and disempowerment may emerge (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Speller et al, 2002).

This patchwork of insights provides some important resources and challenges for policymakers faced with the difficult task of devising initiatives and interventions that will demonstrably boost the pride people

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express in the places that they live. Research also points to the need to consider people as agents who can tell their own stories about a place, make sense of its histories and meanings, and devise aspirations for its future. One key challenge is to engage with this form of identification without neglecting those other forms of shared identity and experience that are also crucial to people's lives and sense of self, such as class, gender and ethnicity. The identities we all forge are multiple in kind, and inherently complicated, and policymakers need to appreciate that different aspects of those identities will be salient to people in different contexts.

Positive and negative associations of pride
Positive feelings about a place can create, and reflect, a widespread sense of optimism about its future. Conversely, fractured place-identities and ingrained local pessimism can undermine feelings of wellbeing and confidence for individuals and communities. Pride has a binding quality, and is associated with more tightly bound communities, forged around shared experiences of employment, or other markers – such as religion. It is broadly associated with higher levels of physical and mental wellbeing, confidence, self-esteem, resilience and social interaction (National Lottery Community Fund, 2021).

There is credible evidence to suggest that feelings of pride in place for individuals can also be enhanced when people are able to engage productively within their communities through volunteering and other civic actions such as greater involvement in key local decisions (What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2018). This is also true of involvement in forms of community ownership and community-led businesses which enhance social capital and have the capacity to improve people's sense of the prospects of their own place (Rogaly and Taylor, 2006). Such initiatives also give people a greater stake in the delivery of local services and agency in their own lives, and are likely to be mutually sustaining, with pride encouraging participation and participation essential to strong feelings of pride (Institute for Community Studies, 2019).

Communities that are poorly served in terms of the range and quality of their infrastructure, that feel locked out of local decision-making processes and have little control over or ownership in the stories of their places, are more likely to experience social isolation and a sense of 'placelessness' (Relph, 1976; National Community Lottery Fund, 2021). And the impact of feelings of anger, dislocation and isolation are recurring themes in those parts of the literature that focus upon 'left behind' communities and poorer towns. Proshansky calls this the "anxiety and defensive function" which is acute when our identity with place becomes under threat (Proshansky et al, 1983; Breakwell, 1986).

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Restoring pride?
The idea that a sense of community pride is in decline in many poorer places, which lies at the heart of the White Paper, does however merit critical consideration. There are a number of reasons for scepticism about this assumption.

First, such claims are sometimes based upon studies of data generated by surveys that have posed questions about belonging and satisfaction. These are not necessarily synonymous with pride, and as Figure 1 illustrates, people feel differently about these different values.

Figure 1:
Neighbourhood belonging versus local area satisfaction
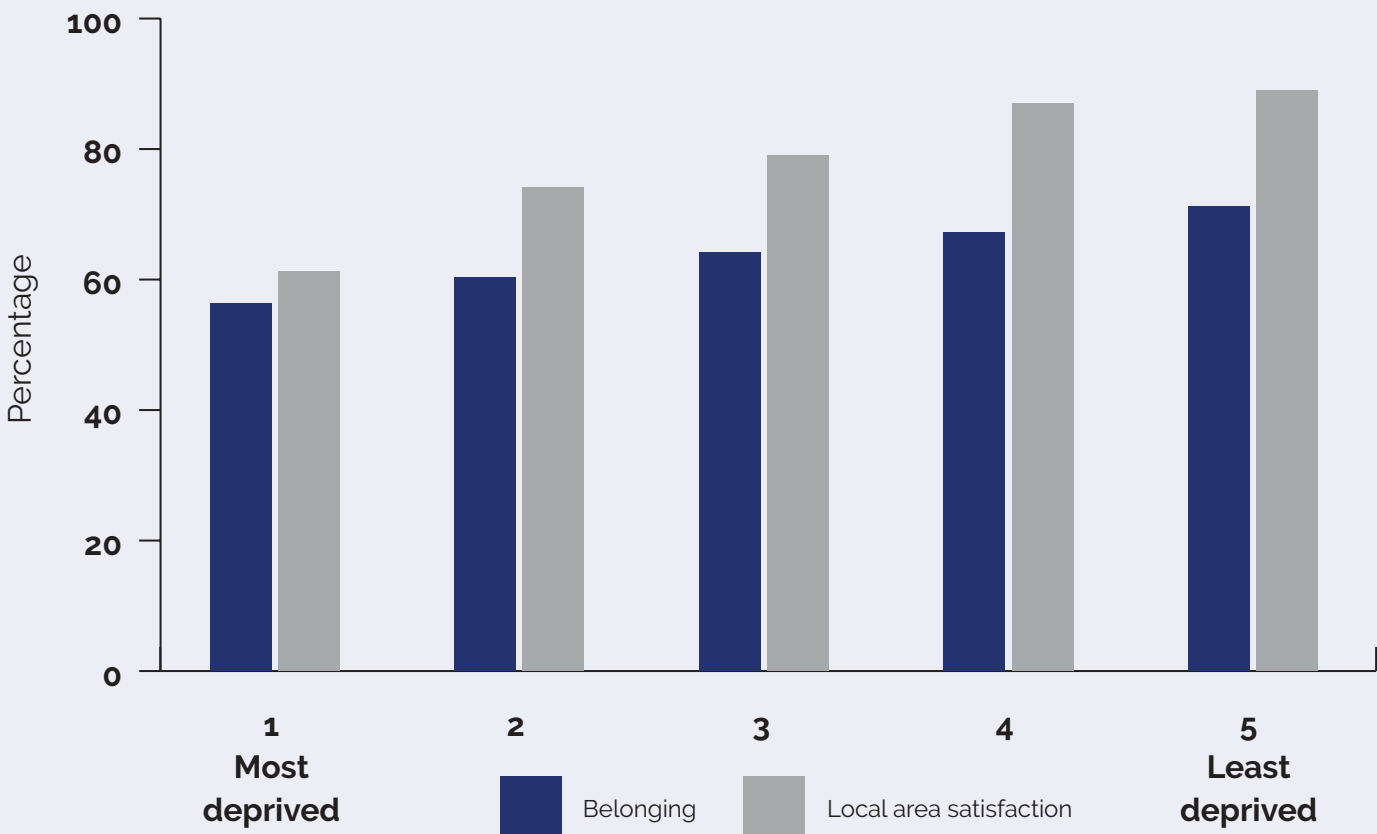
Source: Table B4 and B8 (Community Life Survey, 2021).
Figure 1 shows the percentage of adults who feel they 'very' or 'fairly strongly' belong to their immediate neighbourhood in blue and the percentage of adults who are satisfied with their local area as a place to live in grey.

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Equally, as our analysis of one of the key datasets used by policy researchers in this area – the Community Life Survey – indicates, there are signs that feelings of 'belonging' in many poorer places have over time been increasing.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the percentage of people who feel they 'belong' to their immediate neighbourhood has risen from 58 per cent in 2013/14 when the series began, to 65 per cent in 2020/21.
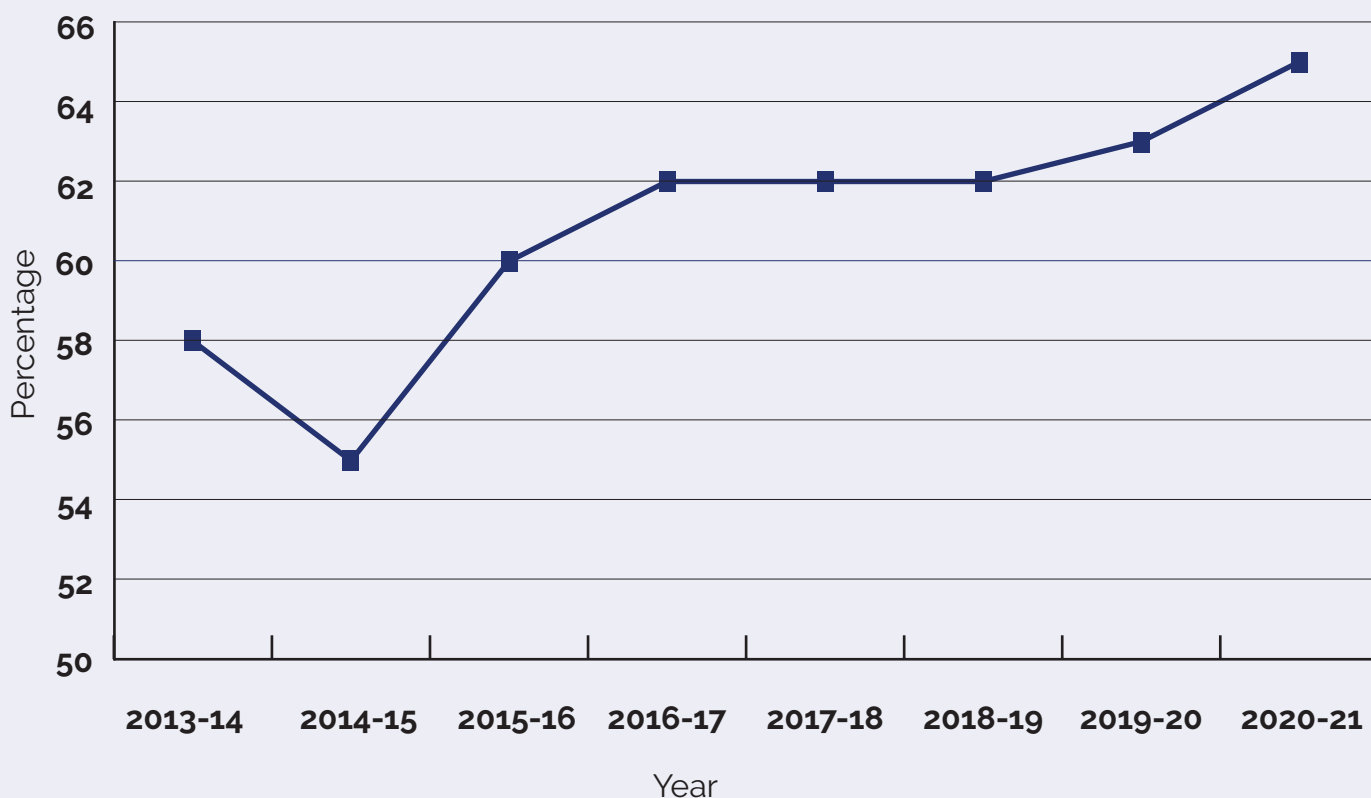
Figure 2:
Neighbourhood belonging

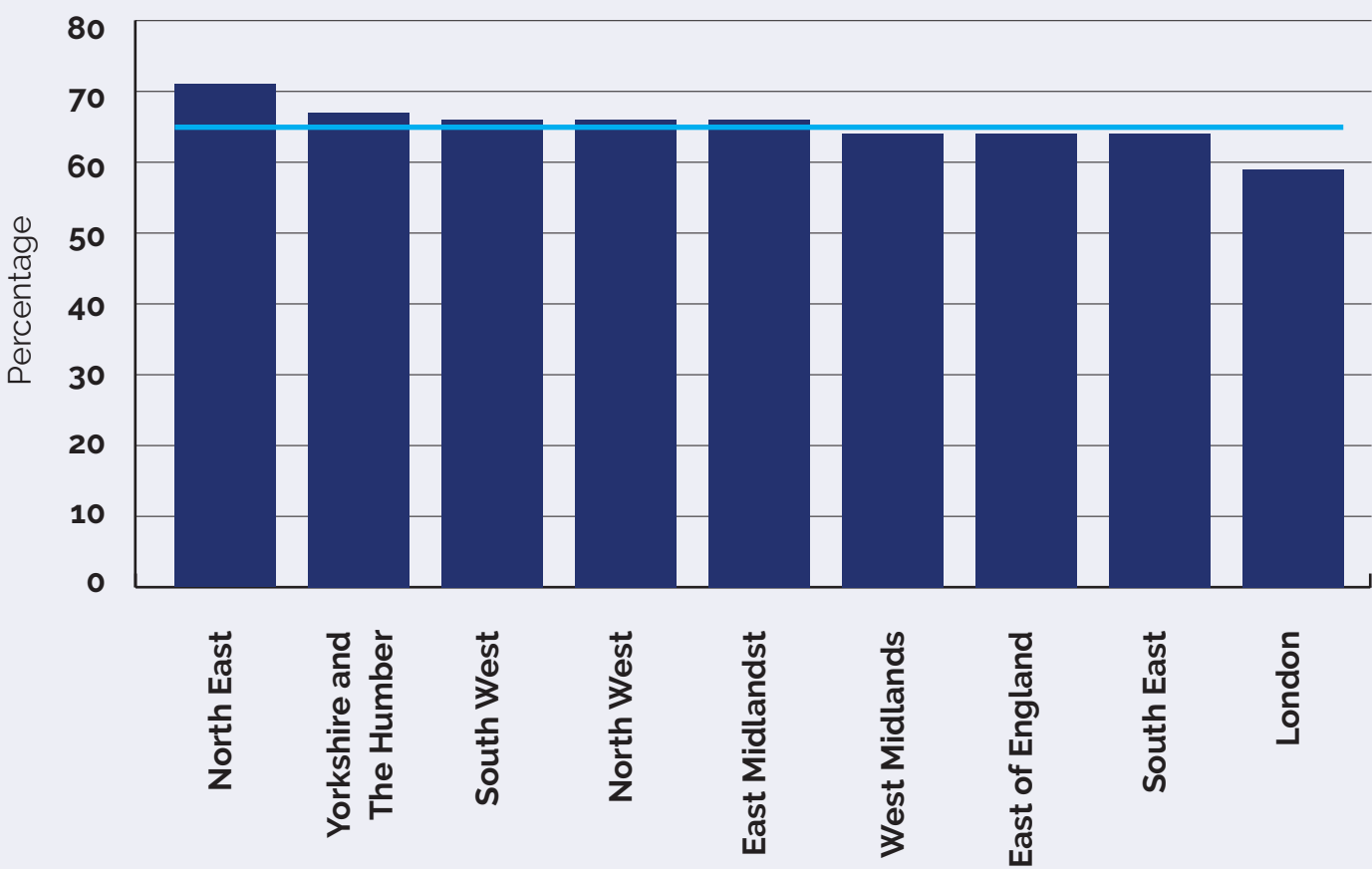**Source:** Table 3A (Community Life Survey, 2021).
Figure 2 shows the percentage of adults who feel they 'very' or 'fairly strongly' belong to their immediate neighbourhood between 2013/14 and 2020/21.

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And as we see in Figure 3, if we break down these findings by region, the North East – which is by most measures one of England's poorest – scores highest for 'belonging', with 71 per cent indicating that they feel that they belong in their neighbourhood, up from 55 per cent in 2013/14 (Community Life Survey, 2021). A sense of belonging is, by contrast, lowest in London with 59 per cent indicating that they feel they belong in 2020/21. This evidence challenges the prevailing assumption of a linear decline of feelings of belonging – which is often linked to notions of pride, and also raises questions about whether economic improvement and affluence necessarily enhance such feelings.

Figure 3:
Neighbourhood belonging by region

Source: Table B4 (Community Life Survey, 2021).
Figure 3 shows the percentage of adults who feel they 'very' or 'fairly strongly' belong to their immediate neighbourhood, by English region.

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Mapping pride

In relation to the newly established Levelling Up Fund, central government has given an indication of which areas it considers to be most in need in its Index of Priority Places. Despite the commitment in the White Paper to "boost pride in place across every corner of England", its mapping of left-behind places is based on metrics including productivity, unemployment and vacant dwellings, but subjective measures – such as belonging and pride – are not included (Levelling Up Fund Round 2, 2022). This suggests that the focus upon the value of these types of measure, which is articulated elsewhere in the White Paper, has not been fully internalised when it comes to the criteria relating to funding allocations.

But it is important that government grasps that places that are left-behind economically are not necessarily those where feelings of pride in place are most diminished. There is, we would suggest, a real need to take more seriously the 'emotional geography' of places alongside their economic geography in relation to the pride objective, and to understand that people in poorer towns and left-behind areas may be just as likely to express pride in the places that they live, and in its heritage.

In a recent report, the Social Market Foundation identified a very similar tension in relation to the objective of enhancing wellbeing. It notes that those places where subjective wellbeing is lowest are often located in more affluent, urban areas (Martin et al, 2021; Social Market Foundation, 2022). These include Islington, Camden, Cannock

Chase and Southwark. As with pride, there are many affluent places that report lower wellbeing. For this reason, government should be careful not to use economic geographies to map the terrain of pride, as it has done with the Index of Deprived Places in the Levelling Up Fund. This may pose a challenge for policymakers in that addressing the challenges of economic inequality may not be a guarantee that the objective of boosting local pride is also met.

There is therefore no automatic relationship between relative affluence and a sense of pride, primarily because the latter cannot be reduced to economic determinants alone, but this is not to suggest that these links do not exist and government needs to be alive to the complex nature of the relationship between pride and deprivation in different places. A number of studies find that there is a relationship of this kind in some areas. The Community Life Survey reported that 62 per cent of adults living in the poorest areas were 'satisfied' with where they live, compared to 90 per cent of the most affluent. Likewise, 57 per cent of the most deprived adults felt they 'belonged' to their immediate neighbourhood, compared with 72 per cent in the most affluent places in England.

Measurement

Challenges of measurement

There is very little reliable polling data in the UK on the specific question of pride, as opposed to other related values, such as satisfaction, belonging and community spirit. While there is a growing sense in policy and politics that there is something valuable for individuals and communities about how they feel about their local area and its worth, there are difficult questions that need to be navigated both in terms of how pride is defined and understood, as outlined in the previous section, and especially about how it might be measured.

For a government that has set itself an ambitious policy target in this area, devising robust forms of measurement so that it can assess whether interventions and funding allocations have their intended impact is imperative. In those few studies that have tried to quantify and compare levels of pride in different communities, there is a tendency to use various proxy measures – like feelings of belonging and community spirit – and rely on surveys with questions on these. Useful as this can be, it does not necessarily provide an adequate basis for considering and understanding shifts in community-level feelings about the fortunes and values of a place.

As a result, there is an imperative for the new Office for Local Government and the Levelling Up Advisory Council to work closely with government and take seriously the tasks of compiling more robust data in this area and exploring different ways of measuring potential interventions in relation to the pride objective set out in the White Paper.

Unlike the White Paper's other objectives and missions, there is important preliminary work to be done around data collection and public consultation before funding streams are allocated and specific policy ambitions established.

If pride in place is going to be reliably quantified there is a need to generate better data about individual and community perspectives at more granular levels. The current primary source in this area, the Community Life Survey, collects data at the individual level and then amalgamates it for reporting on a regional basis. At this level, as indicated above, the data does not straightforwardly support the claim that pride has declined. The lack of neighbourhood-level data, or even local authority level data, is likely to be a serious barrier to measuring the impact of any interventions in this space, and more careful thinking is needed about the merits and weaknesses of commonly used proxies such as belonging, local area satisfaction and civic participation.

As it works through the complexities and challenges of defining pride and developing a measure for it, government may wish to consider relevant lessons from the history of the concept and measurement of wellbeing. This too is a notion that defies easy categorisation and measurement despite being of growing interest to policymakers. But over some years, it has become the focus of considerable analytical and conceptual work, with on-going disagreement about how it should be measured (Agarwala et al, 2022; Alexandrova and Fabian, 2022). Despite this, wellbeing is now employed as a key metric

Measurement

by governments around the world and is routinely measured as an official statistic in the UK (Deaton et al, 2014).

Contextual measures
Given the difficulties associated with measuring pride in place, and the imperative to understand feelings and trends at local community level, there is also a good case for asking local authorities, including parish councils, to articulate their own sense of what makes people proud of where they live. This is an agenda that might be taken forward through the forthcoming Community Spaces and Relationships strategy with its proposed emphasis on supporting community action.

An alternative approach would be to allow local and devolved authorities to devise their own metrics in relation to this mission. But, while there is certainly a strong case for involving local communities in the development and delivery of some of the place-based interventions which government envisages, a move away from national metrics would render impossible the kinds of comparisons between areas that the White Paper articulates, and which is needed to ensure that different funding decisions are seen as legitimate (for a parallel discussion about wellbeing, see Agarwala et al, 2022).

It would be wise to consider a blended approach of nationally set metrics alongside locally created metrics. The difference-in-difference approach adopted by Power to Change, whereby an authority is 'baselined' relative to its 'statistical neighbours' – those authorities that share common socio-economic and demographic features – may

be worth considering in this respect, not least because of the evidence supplied by some local studies that people's sense of the fortunes of their place is more typically measured against other nearby towns and cities, than to London as policymakers are often inclined to do (Power to Change, 2021).

Aside from subjective feelings about pride, there are other relevant kinds of data that can provide important indirect indications about community feelings about place. These include the quantity of community assets such as leisure and sporting facilities, cultural amenities and natural endowments, which are widely viewed as instrumental to the life and quality of communities, and in the future could be captured by a comprehensive Community Asset Register (Kelsey and Kenny, 2021; Coyle and Westwood, 2022). Equally, rates of voter turnout and levels of engagement with local authorities are useful indirect indicators of the state of the local civic culture. And one of the 'headline' indicators that the White Paper references – the prevalence of anti-social behaviour – is also likely to be useful in this respect.

These measures could, we suggest, be incorporated within a suite of indicators relating to community-wide activities, such as participation and volunteering, trust, social contact (or isolation) and wellbeing. This mix of indicators would provide policymakers with an enhanced understanding of the relative standings of different communities on measures – like wellbeing – that have a close relationship with pride. There is also a real need to reflect the inherently contextual character of this objective in the data that is

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gathered in relation to it, and an imperative to capture and reflect on subjective, intangible feelings as well.

A combination of objective social indicators and more localised polling may constitute the most accessible data that can be compiled at present. Even with this resource, policy in this area will be required to cope with a number of different kinds of uncertainty. Assessing the impact of policy interventions will, for instance, require judgements to be made about the geographical scale at which community benefit is being measured.

In exploring local frameworks of measurement, there are several international and historical examples from which government might usefully draw. In the United States there has been an extended debate about those features of the urban environment, often in poorer neighbourhoods, which are most likely to undermine feelings of pride, particularly in the context of its deep-rooted history of racial inequality. And as part of this agenda, there have been surveys conducted to identify the 'physical markers of distrust' which speak to the perception of diminished pride and community safety in neighbourhoods. These include surveying places with an excessive number of warning or security system signs, high fencing, or shutters on commercial or residential properties (Civic Commons, 2019).

Composite indices

These considerations explain why some people have developed composite indices in relation to this objective. A number of these have been compiled in relation to the levelling up agenda, although these are typically focused on a wider range of variables than pride. These include the Centre for Thriving Places' *Thriving Places Index*, Demos' *Place Satisfaction Index,* Onward's *Social Fabric Index*, the Greater London Authority's *Civic Strength's Index* and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's S*ocial Progress Index*. Each of these incorporates measures that are designed to capture feelings of pride, as well as other values.

There is no ready-made template which government can recycle in relation to the objective set out in the White Paper. Composite indices are not necessarily the answer, if they are made up of various weak proxy measures. It would be better overall to attempt to improve the quality of measures of pride, including generating more regular and robust survey data.

Iterative measurement

Capturing the impact of initiatives in relation to this goal requires a robust evaluation process, and the absence of this is a cause for concern. In 2019, just eight per cent of government expenditure on major projects – £35 billion out of £432 billion – had robust evaluation plans in place (National Audit Office, 2021).

One area where there is routine evaluation of the impact of interventions upon feelings of pride is major sporting or cultural events. For these, pre- and post-event evaluations are conducted in line with HM Treasury's Magenta Book to enable government to

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understand the impacts its investment generates. Analysis of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, for example, revealed that 87 per cent of Glaswegians reported feeling pride in the city of Glasgow in 2012, two years before the Games, which increased to 91 per cent in 2016, while pride in the local area increased from 60 to 74 per cent (Scottish Government, 2018). The pre-Games evaluation of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games includes similar measurement (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: Birmingham pre-Games Evaluation Report, 2022). And a similar evaluation was undertaken by Hull to gauge the impact of its year as City of Culture in 2017; this reported that 70 per cent of people from Hull were proud of the city in 2016, 75 per cent in 2017, and 71 per cent in 2018 (Culture, Place and Policy Institute, 2018). These approaches are not without their methodological limitations, but they would afford a sense of perspective regarding what kinds of increase in feelings of pride can reasonably be expected, depending on the scale of the intervention and over what timeframe this pride might occur.

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In this chapter, we reflect upon some of the key policy tools that are most pertinent to the challenge of enhancing the cultural life of poorer towns and left-behind areas, and boosting the feelings of place-identity which can – as we have outlined – make an important contribution to some of the other key objectives that UK policymakers are most interested in, such as economic growth and social capital. The Levelling Up White Paper highlights three domains which have the potential to contribute to this objective: regeneration; communities; and culture, heritage and sport.

In the discussion below we look at these broad areas, all of which are likely to have a direct bearing upon the pride objective. But this is, to some degree, an arbitrary selection leaving out areas like crime, the built environment and the local economy, which are all just as likely to impact this goal. The reflections we provide on some of the most important policy challenges that fall within the three headings set out in the White Paper draw upon research and evidence that has been compiled internationally and is intended to be the start of a much needed, wider and more evidentially informed conversation about the kind of policy agenda that governments of different political colours might need to contemplate if they are serious about tackling the cultural and affective aspects of spatial inequality, as well as their economic dimensions.

High streets

High streets have figured prominently in discussions about the policy response needed to address the plight of left-behind places and poorer towns that has taken hold in the UK. They have also been the focus of various policy initiatives across Europe – for instance the *Cœur de Ville* programme launched in France by President Macron in 2017.

High streets and town centres are the most prominent and visible parts of many communities. They typically host its most important assets and are one of the keys to the economic prospects of places. But they also matter greatly in cultural terms and are often one of the primary sources of identity or character that a place is taken to possess. Often referred to as the 'heart' or 'soul' of an area, vibrant high streets can be used to promote a place to locals, tourists and investors alike. When they are struggling, they have been dubbed 'ghost towns' and 'crap towns', and when premises are vacant and windows are boarded up, they are often taken as *prima facie* evidence of an area's decline. As one interviewee from Barrow-in-Furness reported amidst the deluge of empty shops on her high street, "each building is like another tooth being knocked out" (New Constellations, 2022).

There is a good deal of polling data, as well as anecdotal evidence, which illustrates the importance of high streets as contributors to feelings about a place and its fortunes. According to recent polling by YouGov, 69 per cent of people believe that the decline of their high streets will adversely affect their own pride in their local area (Power to Change, 2022). A recent survey commissioned by More in Common found that about half of those interviewed believe

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that their local high street had declined in the last decade, with many respondents pointing to vacant premises, the loss of independent businesses and the rise in anti-social behaviour (Create Streets, 2021; More in Common, 2022). And in a survey examining feelings of pride across Manchester, 42 per cent cited high street decline as one of the main causes of this trend (Public First, 2022).

There are multiple reasons why many British high streets are struggling, and these include the huge impact of online retail and delivery services. The Covid-19 pandemic was a major shock to many town centres, but is best understood as exacerbating existing trends. And the rise in prices and wider cost of living crisis are both likely to accentuate these even further. Vacancy rates are at an all-time high, particularly in places like Rotherham, Bolton and Grimsby, and rates of online shopping are notably higher in England than elsewhere in Europe (Create Streets, 2021; Power to Change, 2022; Local Government Association, 2022)

This combination of trends and shocks increasingly represents a significant challenge to the financial viability of the existing high street model. As we argued in a previous report, *Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure*, high streets that have well-maintained community spaces as well as an appealing commercial offer are more likely to attract people to them and retain visitors for longer, than those that are focused exclusively on retail (Kelsey and Kenny, 2021). This alone places a premium on the importance of those areas with well-maintained forms of community amenity, like parks, libraries, community hubs and cafes.

Some research makes the case for attracting and supporting community-led businesses to high streets, as these are generally more likely to remain in the premises they occupy than other commercial enterprises and tend to be more concentrated in disadvantaged communities (Heap et al, 2019). Community-led businesses are also more likely to look towards longer-term rewards, and offer a greater degree of commitment to their local area (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: By Deeds and their Results, 2019).

High streets are often at the core of the stories people tell about the places they live, and are integral to the mental geography many carry with them. If they are felt to be in deep decline – as has been the case in many cities, towns and villages across the country – there is often a wider impact upon how a locality is seen as doing, by outsiders as well as locals. And this judgement, recent research shows, tends to be made in a relative way, with other nearby places typically the source of implicit comparison (Menon and Stowers, 2022). Taken together, this evidence suggests that the failure to invest in and renew high streets can have damaging impacts upon morale in particular areas, and in turn deplete the factors which are most conducive to both pride and economic growth.

The key amenities that also give a place its character are very often located on, or in close proximity to, the local high street. These include statues, war memorials and benches inscribed with the name of loved ones (Public First, 2022). These central areas typically provide the most important opportunities

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for social interaction in a local area – both in terms of community amenities like libraries and green spaces, but also through businesses like hairdressers, pubs and coffee shops. In the Swedish cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Helsingborg, initiatives like Street Moves design ready-made street furniture to enable more social interaction in high streets and similar initiatives are now to be found across the UK (Orange, 2021).

Local, independent shops are among the most valued and recognisable features of these central areas, as are those, increasingly few, department stores which often 'anchor' a high street. Local communities often express a real sense of loss and disenfranchisement when these are on the verge of disappearing, and when they are replaced by outlets like gambling and charity shops.

Regeneration

Regeneration is widely cited as one of the main policy tools that authorities can use to revitalise the economic fortunes of a place, and this theme figures prominently in the White Paper and the Levelling Up Fund. It is depicted both as an important lever that can be pulled to boost economic growth and cited as a means of meeting the pride objective (Levelling Up Fund, 2022). But the idea that regeneration is the automatic route to both of these goals overlooks some of the complexities and challenges that need to be faced if these different policy aims are to be effectively aligned.

Forms of regeneration that bring derelict infrastructure back into use have a very wide appeal and may well improve feelings about

how an area is doing. And there have been some striking examples, in recent years, of regeneration projects that have emerged when a building or amenity is at risk. In Leeds, Grade-II listed Edwardian Bathhouse, Bramley Baths, was facing closure a decade ago until the Friends of Bramley Baths stepped in to take ownership of the site. Today it receives over 100,000 visits each year, offering swimming lessons for disabled children and an arts and culture programme to support young people develop the soft skills necessary to take advantage of local employment opportunities (Power to Change, 2021).

Likewise, when a local community in Sheffield took over a derelict site over two decades ago, they turned it into Heeley People's Park, funded it through local contributions, and over time it has become the largest community-run park in the UK (Twigger-Ross and the Government Office for Science, 2013; Create Streets, 2021). In the US, communities were more willing to pay for cultural amenities and sports facilities, as is the case in Pittsburgh, when this option was framed around the goal of boosting the community's feelings about the locality (Groothuis et al, 2001; Groothuis et al, 2004; Rothschild and Wysong, 2009; Groothuis and Rotthoff, 2014). A similar instance was witnessed in Ohio when locals took the decision to invest in their libraries (Klinenberg, 2020). Finally, the site occupied by *The Hastings Observer* newspaper had been dormant for years after the paper folded, and had passed through multiple owners. But once it passed into community hands, it was properly restored and now hosts dozens of small businesses

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(Create Streets, 2021). These kinds of examples provide a powerful illustration of the ways in which regeneration, when involving local communities, can give new meaning and purpose to local places.

But regeneration is sometimes controversial, and often unpopular, in the eyes of many local communities. It is widely associated with the feeling that distant authorities are making decisions about an area without consulting the local community, often with commercial motives to the fore, rather than local needs. There is a close association in the popular mind with regeneration programmes and outcomes like gentrification. There are many examples of the repurposing of industrial-era architecture into high-end amenities, and the conversion of substandard civic infrastructure into new investment opportunities, which have been focused solely on securing a return on investment rather than providing a public amenity. This criticism has been powerfully made of a number of post-industrial parks in the United States, which are increasingly under private ownership and also of some examples of city-centre development in the UK (Gospodini, 2004; Loughran, 2022).

There are, however, examples of community perceptions shifting as regeneration projects take hold, and as positive changes to the local environment and amenities become apparent (Kuik and Musall, 2011; Wheeler, 2017).

There are many other instances where local opposition to such projects are triggered and sustained by appeals to tradition and indeed pride in the area as it currently exists. The White Paper overlooks actual and potential conflicts between boosting pride and meeting its other objectives.

Yet, given how important regeneration is to the growing imperative for policymakers to focus upon achieving economic growth, this is a challenge that cannot simply be evaded or wished away. If government wants to pursue both of these policy objectives, there needs to be a sustained focus on understanding and engaging with community perspectives. An emphasis on devising better forms of engagement and co-production in relation to regeneration schemes is essential.

It is not just feelings of attachment to place that shape opposition to regeneration schemes, new infrastructure and local economic development. These are often triggered by objections to the processes by which planning permission is granted, and to the ways in which community voices are engaged or indeed ignored (Wester-Herber, 2004).

In the UK there are number of initiatives that have attempted to give communities a greater voice in local decision-making in relation to the built environment which are pertinent in this regard. The neighbourhood planning process – which is designed to give communities the power to develop a shared vision of their neighbourhood's future (and their past) – has enabled a large number of groups (more than 2,600) to participate in such processes. And the case has been made for new approaches to enhance local participation in matters relating to the built

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environment. For instance, the recent 'Street Votes' idea affords local communities the opportunity to hold referenda on aspects of a new development's design (York, 2022).

The UK Government has set out further details on this idea in its Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which is currently proceeding through Parliament, and there is a strong case for introducing pilot schemes to test out these ideas. More generally, there needs to be an acceptance that opposition to development often arises in part as there are too few meaningful ways for communities to have a say over their own area's needs. And there is the prospect that the current legislation may actually make things worse in this regard. Legal advice presented to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee on the implications of the forthcoming Bill on the planning process suggested that it "radically centralises planning decision-making and substantially erodes public participation in the planning system" (Betts, 2022).

Culture
In addition to plans for the regeneration of sites and places within poorer areas, a focus upon cultural provision, and the renewal of heritage sites, also provide an important part of the policy toolkit that might be deployed in relation to the pride in place objective. There is evidence to suggest that such initiatives are likely to have positive impacts on the civic infrastructure of the places where they are located, and sometimes on their local economies through job creation and the development of a tourist economy (Collins, 2016; Heap et al, 2019;

Power to Change, 2021). But there has been much less investigation of, and evidence gathered about, their potential emotional and psychological benefits.

One exception to this rule, which worthy of further examination, is the evaluation of the impact of international cultural or sporting events hosted in the UK, noted previously. This is a requirement by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Recent examples include the Commonwealth Games hosted in Glasgow (2014) and the City of Culture in Hull (2017), and some of the polling conducted suggests a small upward trend in terms of their impact in this area.

Prior to the Glasgow games, polling conducted in 2012 revealed that 60 per cent of Glaswegians felt proud of their local area. By 2016 this had increased to 74 per cent. Over the same four-year period, pride in the city of Glasgow increased from 87 per cent in 2012 to 91 per cent in 2016 (Scottish Government, 2018). The pre-evaluation report ahead of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games also identified increasing civic pride as a short- medium- and long-term objective across both the city of Birmingham and the West Midlands region. Concerns have already been identified in Birmingham that elements of its community have not been adequately engaged and this should be a cause of concern to policymakers given, as evidence from Glasgow's Commonwealth Games demonstrates, opportunities to participate in programmes of cultural and sporting activity were an important driver behind tying together feelings of identity and pride

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(Murray, 2022). It was also reported that the City of Culture in Hull afforded a valuable opportunity to challenge negative images about the city and supplant them with a new, more positive and hopeful narrative which resonated with many local residents.

These kinds of initiatives, along with other micro-level interventions, like holding farmers' markets and street festivals, are often dismissed by sceptics as short-term in impact, and insufficient to address the underlying needs of poorer areas and the root economic causes of their plight. Some of these criticisms suggest a degree of economic reductionism and reflect an implicit commitment to a policy paradigm shaped by agglomerationist economic thinking. But this approach, and its geographically limited outcomes, are exactly what has been thrown into question by events like Brexit and the growing focus on left-behind places which lies at the heart of the levelling up agenda. And these developments underpin the importance of giving consideration to social as well as economic inequalities.

In practical terms, the question of how long-lasting the effects of events and festivals are upon people's feelings about their local area and its prospects – in comparison with initiatives like improving social amenities or investing in local business growth – is an important one. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the affective impact of such initiatives is typically short-lived. More generally, the question of which kinds of cultural activity are likely to have a longer and more enduring impact is one that deserves more serious

consideration in policy circles (Ritchie and Smith, 1991; Wood, 2006; What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2018).

Aside from one-off events, there have been a number of distinct, tailored initiatives designed to enhance local pride, while also hitting some important economic and social targets. These may provide more fruitful examples which government can learn from. These include the various City Pride initiatives of the 1990s which placed particular importance on culture-led urban regeneration, such as the development of the Bullring and Grand Central in Birmingham, which built on the city's "municipal traditions" and "modern vision" of tourism infrastructure to provide a contemporary retail and cultural offer, though there is a need to avoid the 'competitive localism' of that period and its abiding focus on securing short-term government funding (Hall, 1995; Williams, 1995).

Heritage
Sites, landscape features and buildings with a historical provenance have an important role to play in relation to the pride objective. In part this is because of the intimate relationship between history and place which heritage often embodies and promotes. Equally, the heritage sector has in recent years sought to navigate a number of difficult questions about the cultural and political meanings of heritage, as well as the economic benefits it can yield. For policymakers there is a need, as the new Chair of the Levelling Up Advisory Council, Andy Haldane, has said, to appreciate that places must be "rooted in heritage, but not

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held hostage by it" (Centre for London, 2022).

Polling evidence confirms how important heritage is to many people's sense of place. YouGov reported in 2018 that local heritage is an important source of pride among two-thirds of adults in England. In a separate survey, 80 per cent of respondents indicated that local heritage makes their area a better place to live (Historic England, 2020). Separately, the National Lottery Heritage Fund has demonstrated that many of its investments during the past two decades have generated positive feelings about place, supported local pride, and promoted social cohesion (National Heritage Lottery Fund, 2015).

This is one reason why many local authorities have become actively engaged in heritage-led regeneration schemes, promoting the potential of historic assets to yield social and economic benefits as well as addressing questions of identity and morale in local communities. Crucially, some studies have reported that well maintained and accessible heritage sites increased civic pride, and this increase was confined to those who visited them. In Pittsburgh, 91 per cent of people surveyed thought that Pittsburgh Zoo increased pride, despite only 53 per cent of respondents having visited it. And 92 per cent of people surveyed thought that Carnegie Museum generated local feelings of pride, despite only 42 per cent of those respondents having visited the museum (Groothuis et al, 2004).

Relatedly, the heritage sector has been trying to confront questions about which parts

of the community are included in heritage imagery, and which are not, and continues to consider how to ensure that different parts of a local community know about and are able to access local assets. Several recent studies have provided important evidence in highlighting the unequal access to heritage sites and their uneven spatial distribution and accessibility to different parts of the local community (Taking Part Survey, 2020; RSA Heritage Index, 2020).

Age is a strong predictor of who is most likely to visit a heritage site in the UK (Hope not Hate, 2020). Across all types of heritage locations, with the exception of sites that promote the history of sports, 45-74 year-olds are the most likely to have visited a site in the last 12 months, while members of ethnic and cultural minority groups are much less likely. As Figure 4 reveals, deprivation also impacts upon the likelihood of visiting such sites, with the most affluent decile 63 per cent more likely to visit historic buildings, historic parks and gardens and monuments compared with the least affluent decile (Taking Part Survey, 2020).

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Figure 4:
Percentage of respondents who visited a heritage site within the last 12 months
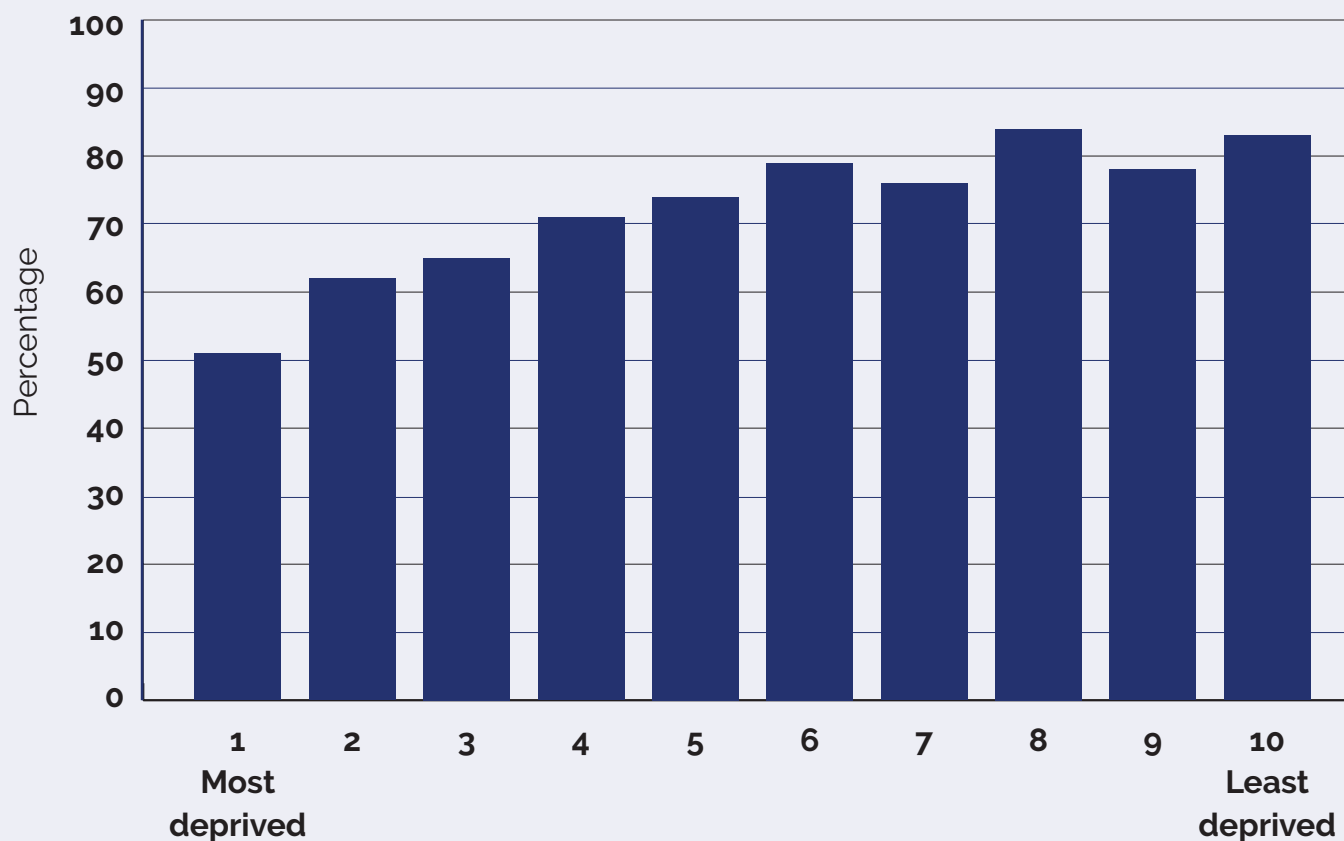
Source: Heritage (Taking Part Survey, 2019/20).
Figure 4 shows the percentage of respondents who visited a heritage site within the last 12 months by deprivation decile.

While a focus upon heritage, broadly defined, makes considerable sense for those tasked with meeting some of the different objectives that are set out in the Levelling Up White Paper, it is vital to consider these ingrained inequalities in terms of its access and use. An entire community is unlikely to benefit form a heritage-based approach unless strategies to ensure wide outreach and to connect with other local stakeholders are also in place. These are issues that this sector is increasingly aware of, with some interesting examples of organisations like The Architectural Heritage Fund, which works closely with communities in the most deprived corners of the country. Moreover, if policymakers can exploit the 'heritage potential' of assets in more deprived communities, new opportunities for people to build stronger ties to their local area may be available. One such example is Castle Point in Essex, which is endowed with a rich industrial heritage, green spaces and walking trails, Hadleigh Ray river, and a site

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of Special Scientific Interest in Holehaven Creek. However, political and civic leaders have been unable to mobilise the potential of these assets. The reduction of local authority funding from central government, especially for discretionary services, is frequently cited as a barrier to nurturing and leveraging the value of these parts of the local landscape.

Local institutions and communities play an important part in ensuring these sites foster inclusive conceptions of local identity and belonging, and at times this will mean vigorous contestation over which elements of a place's past should be honoured, and which criticised, and a readiness to be open about the less palatable parts of a place's industrial heritage and social history. These issues have come to the fore in the UK with a spate of protests over the statues of figures associated with the slave trade – a trend that is echoed in a number of Anglophone countries. Intense debate over the question of what makes people proud of their community and its history, and whether such feelings should be endorsed or challenged, have become integral, and often difficult, elements for developing policy around heritage.

Improving local amenities
The values of various kinds of public amenity have been extensively discussed in policy circles in recent years, in part because of their impact upon community connection, social capital and feelings of pride. In recent years, government has focused its attention upon specific kinds of amenities which might be better funded across the UK, because of their guaranteed health and wider social benefits. There has been a focus upon local sporting facilities such as football pitches and swimming pools, as well as high streets with the support of the Future High Streets Fund. This in part reflects the effects of the pandemic, but also more recently the particular challenges facing such amenities because of the cost of living crisis, and this has triggered recent calls for additional financial support from government (UK Active, 2022).

A growing number of pubs are also under threat, and government has been called upon to save these too. Pubs occupy a symbolic value and are integrally related to feelings of local identity. The cultural impact of pub closures has been well documented. When local pubs close, they are rarely replaced with an amenity that plays a similar community-wide role. Concerns about the rising rate of closures are magnified when other local amenities, in towns and villages, have also been lost, and evidence shows that the closure of pubs has a disproportionate impact in poorer communities (Starkings and Brett, 2021). Since 2001, two in three pubs in Barking and Dagenham have closed their doors. Meanwhile one study estimates that Burnley, Hyndburn and Luton have lost half of their pubs (Onward, 2022). Pubs have in some places acquired additional meaning and emotional significance as the last vestige of the identity and heritage of a community (Sandbu, 2020; Bolat, 2021; Kenny and Kelsey, 2021).

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Separately, as a number of high-profile professional football clubs have been threatened with closure, it has been argued that they provide important public value because of the pride that they evoke in a place, and as one of the few institutions that exist in certain local communities. But the question of whether football clubs merit public investment remains a controversial one.

Fans of Derby County FC, which faced the threat of bankruptcy in 2022, have argued that their club is integral to the identity of the city, and insist that no other institution within it has its 'reach' as a cultural amenity (Frayne, 2022). This argument has on occasions been accepted by government. For example, Bury FC, which went into administration in 2020, become the beneficiary of £1 million from the Community Ownership Fund in part because of the role it plays in the heritage of the wider town (Levelling Up White Paper, 2022).

More generally, there is strong evidence that sports teams and clubs play an important role as a focus for, and public embodiment of, a place. In the US, recent polling indicates that over 60 per cent of people believe that having a professional sports team in their city enhances its image (Groothuis and Rotthoff, 2014).

This is an area where there are clear overlaps and alignments between the civic pride agenda and the local economic goals which are key to tackling deeply ingrained spatial inequalities. Teams playing in the lower tiers of their respective sports are particularly vulnerable to economic threats, especially in the context of the rising costs of energy and the cost of living crisis. While Derby's story has attracted considerable media coverage, other less prominent clubs, such as Forest Green Rovers and Grimsby Town FC in North East Lincolnshire, have indicated their interest in applying for levelling up funding. There is something especially valuable about the role played by smaller clubs in smaller areas, that are more local in their reach and community-orientated in their mission.

Equally, while football has received most attention in this regard, there are many other kinds of sporting clubs which also play important roles among local communities, and which are also facing increasingly difficult economic challenges. And these too have a wider 'reach' than other kinds of cultural amenity.

Young people
The publication of the White Paper, and prospect of the forthcoming Community Spaces and Places Strategy, has added a sharper focus to the discussion of the role that communities can play in relation to the achievement of values like wellbeing, belonging and community pride. As part of this focus, it is imperative to give consideration to the challenges involved in ensuring that different parts of any local community are engaged in, and likely to benefit from, public funding directed to community-level initiatives and activities.

We lack the space here to discuss all of the different demographic divides that are relevant in this context. But we do want to draw attention to the particular needs
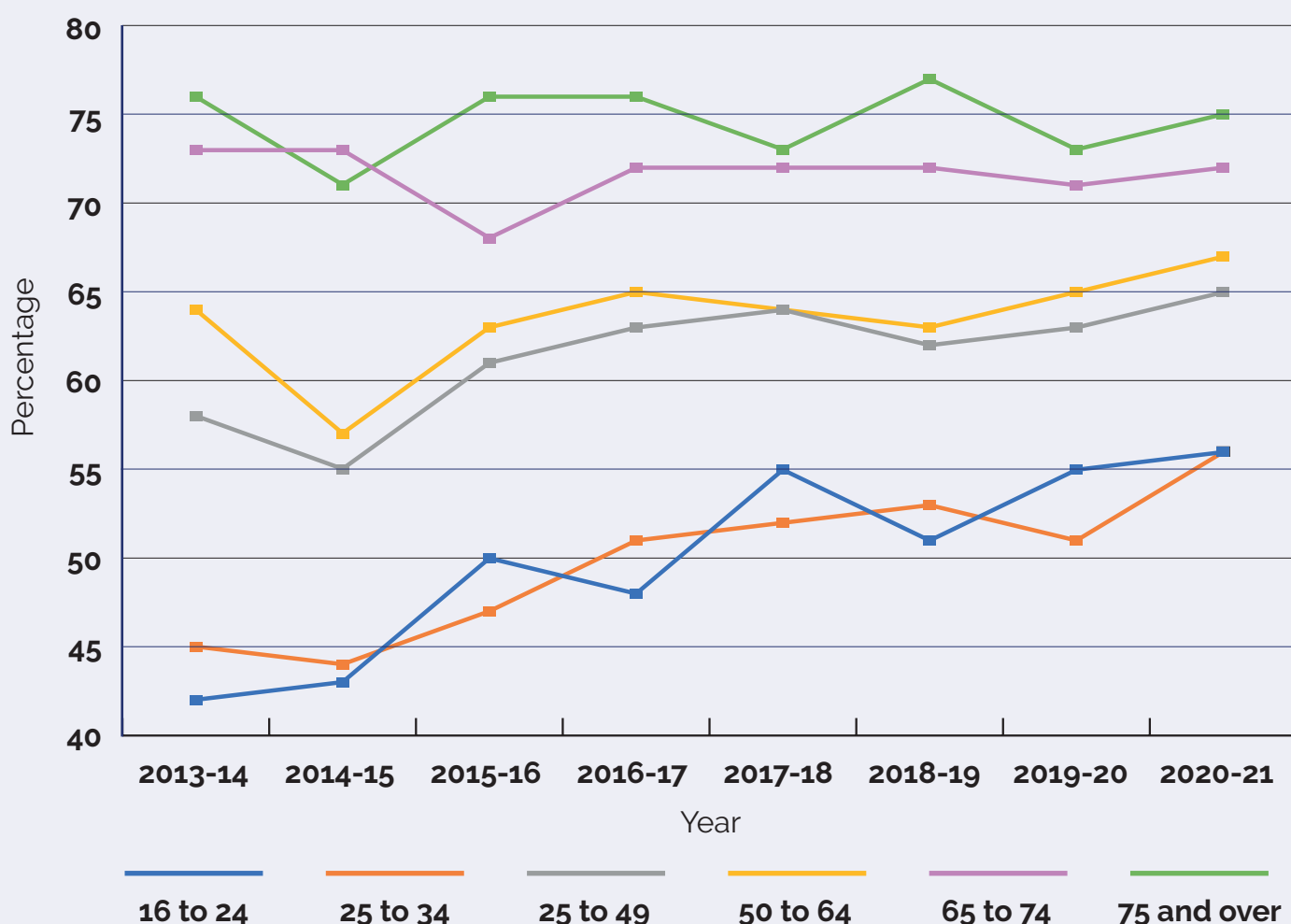
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and position of younger people, given the different results between the extent and shape to which younger and older people understand and experience feelings of pride and belonging.

According to the Community Life Survey, in 2013/14 less than half of adults under the age of 34 expressed strong feelings of belonging in relation to their immediate neighbourhood (42 per cent of 16-24 year-olds and 45 per cent of 25-34 year-olds respectively), as shown in Figure 5. By 2020/21 there was a marked increase in this feeling, with both groups registering 56 per cent. Feelings of pride have fallen slightly in the same period amongst the over-65s (Community Life Survey, 2021).

Figure 5:
Neighbourhood belonging by age

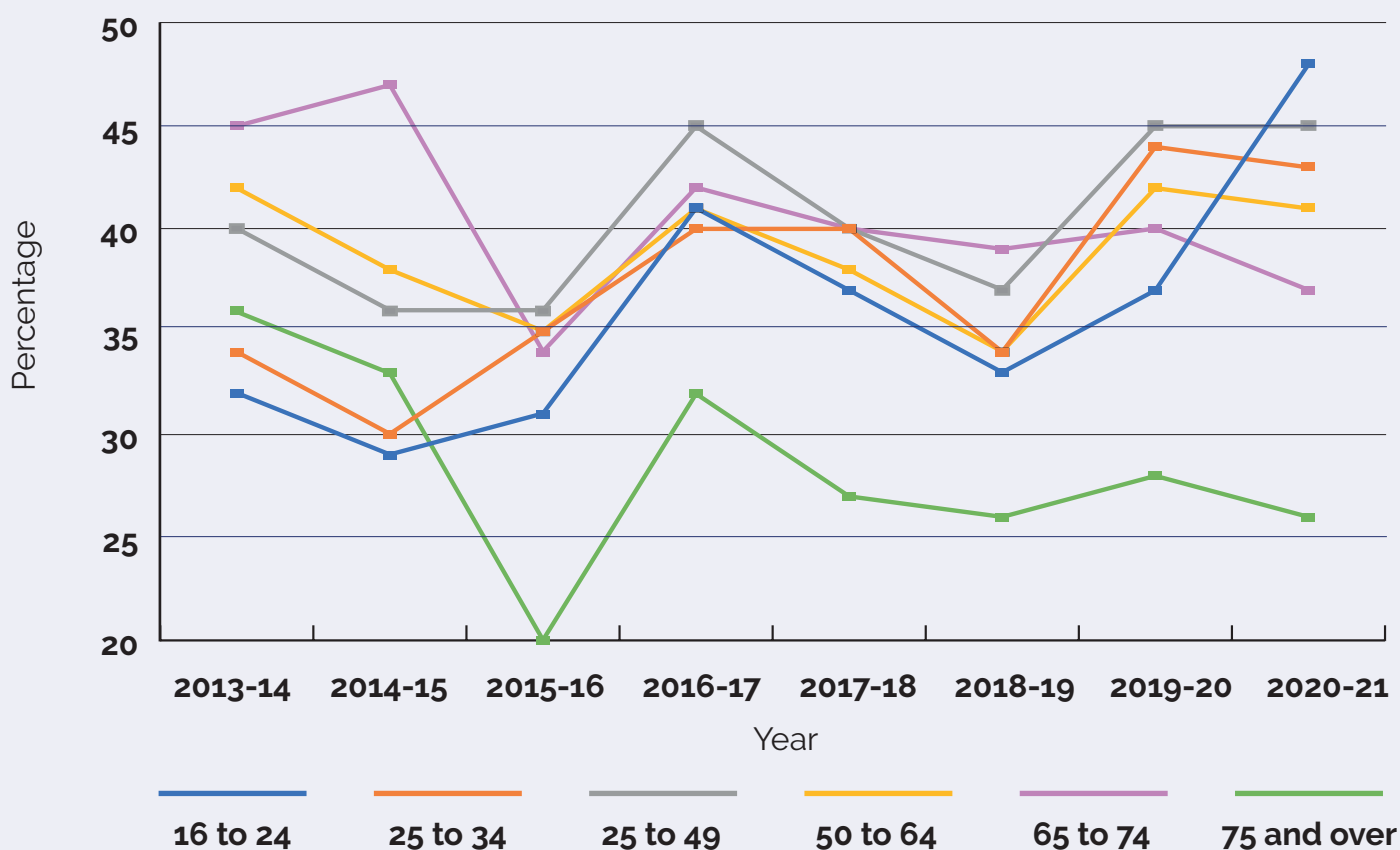**Source:** Table B4 (Community Life Survey, 2021).
Figure 5 shows the percentage of adults who feel they 'very' or 'fairly strongly' belong to their immediate neighbourhood, broken down by age group.

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Identifying the reasons for this rise in feelings of belonging is hard to pin down with any degree of certainty, but the rise in the rates of civic participation among 16-49 year-olds, shown in Figure 6, suggests one factor that may account for this change (Community Life Survey, 2021). The reverse is true for over-50s. Between 2013/14 and 2020/21, civic participation increased by 50 per cent amongst 16-24 year-olds and 26 per cent amongst 25-34 year-olds, while it fell by 18 per cent amongst 65-74 year-olds and 28 per cent amongst the over-75s. These changes may have been exacerbated by the experience of the pandemic, but they were underway before 2019.

Figure 6:
Civic participation by age

Source: Table C1 (Community Life Survey, 2021).
Figure 6 shows the percentage of adults by age group who have been engaged in civic participation at least once in the last 12 months.

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There is some evidence that the availability of good quality cultural amenities is more integral to the feelings of local pride that young people report, and also that employment and other economic opportunities are particularly important too (Harner, 2001; Pretty et al, 2003; Wood, 2006). It may be that the sources of place-identity for older people – such as a connection with local history, a sense of tradition and a knowledge of place – are not as pronounced in younger cohorts, and several studies identify a sense of disappointment shared by older generations about a perceived lack of interest from younger people in the histories of the places that they live (Rubenstein and Parmelee, 1992; Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014; Public First, 2022).

Greater appreciation and awareness of the different relationships that various parts of a community have with local heritage and other assets should be a key requirement for government and other funding bodies. Conversely, there are good reasons to think that restorative programmes in relation to heritage may carry cultural and psychological importance for older people and the places where more of them live, and that the loss of cultural and heritage amenities are most keenly felt among this cohort (Campbell and Rex, 2021; BBC, 2022; Public First, 2022).

More broadly, what underpins pride in 'shrinking and ageing' towns and rural communities may be different to what sustains it in other kinds of places, particularly those where younger and more metropolitan people are clustered together.

Thus investments and initiatives need to be conceived and designed in more bespoke ways as a result.

Conclusion

This chapter reflects on evidence relating to a number of pertinent policy areas and initiatives linked to the idea of enhancing local culture and feelings of identity. This is not a comprehensive guide to relevant policies. We have set out some of the dilemmas and complexities relating to these areas of policy, and this discussion is preliminary in character.

More work is required, and better evidence compiled, to inform and underpin the allocation of funds relating to pride in place. Given the risk of 'jam-spreading' and the concern that competitively awarded funds are allocated disproportionately to those communities and authorities that are best equipped to request them, rather than those that are most in need, there is an additional challenge relating to the pride in place objective (Hanretty, 2021; National Audit Office, 2022; Public Accounts Committee, 2022). This arises from the need to support ventures and projects that are most likely to contribute to the core policy goals which governments of different political colours are likely to pursue in relation to the challenges of spatial inequalities in the UK – primarily boosting productivity, stimulating growth and developing social capital. Achieving certainty about judgements on the allocation of funding is very hard given the quality of currently available evidence.

Policy Interventions

More generally, the pride objective generates a potent and difficult challenge in this area which Whitehall and sub-national authorities should explore more fully. This concerns the evidence that many of the places that exhibit the greatest degree of pride in their own locality and heritage are also those that need most economic support. Boosting pride in place and tackling the needs of the most deprived communities are not goals that always easily align. Equally, feelings of pride are forged in situational and inter-personal ways and are typically evoked through the stories that people tell about their places, and occasionally through the perceptions that external actors form of them. These kinds of relationship, perceptions and rooted ways of thinking will not be easily or automatically shifted by the tools that policymakers typically use when tackling issues of social deprivation and economic decline.

There is scepticism about the superficial and cosmetic initiatives which have been linked to this objective in the White Paper, some of which may be justified. But behind such criticism there lies a deeper debate about whether politicians of right and left accept that there are meaningful cultural and economic objectives to be pursued in relation to regional inequalities and the challenges of left-behind places. If so, there needs to be a much richer discussion of the kinds of policy choices required to address these in tandem.

Recommendations

Taking the Levelling Up White Paper as a starting point, drawing on a disparate literature, we have sketched out some of the key conceptual and empirical issues associated with the complex and contested idea of pride in place. This notion figures prominently in the White Paper but has been much less debated than some of its other main objectives. This report is a preliminary attempt to bring some rigour to policymakers' understanding of this idea and to set out some of the misconceptions and assumptions associated with it.

We have limited our discussion to the three policy domains that are linked to this objective in the White Paper: regeneration, communities and culture, heritage and sport. But other key policy areas, such as crime and anti-social behaviour, green spaces and local institutions and their civic and political leaders, are just as important to it.

In terms of the key question of measurement, this report argues that it does not follow that pride in place has 'diminished' in a linear sense, nor is it accurate to suggest that the economic fortunes of places, particularly those left-behind areas, map neatly onto their 'emotional geographies'. Without a credible approach to measurement, the chances of this mission being realised are slim. There is a high degree of uncertainty caused by the insufficiently granular data available, and the inadequate data architecture needed to measure pride – as the Technical Annex to the White Paper attests. There is an abiding need to introduce evaluations into this area of policy, and to provide enough support for local and devolved institutions to evaluate the interventions they deliver.

RECOMMENDATION ONE:
CAPACITY FUNDING TO EVALUATE IMPACT

We recommend that capacity funding is made available for *all* recipients of levelling up funds and that it is sufficient to measure the impact of interventions delivered in local communities at specified intervals in order to inform future activity to boost pride. To do so, pre- and post-evaluation would need to take place. This would not be an unprecedented move as the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport routinely requires organisations delivering international sporting events to measure their activities and evaluate their impact in relation to local feelings of pride.

RECOMMENDATION TWO:
POLL PRIDE

Government should introduce new questions relating to the pride objective in its Community Life Survey and Taking Part Survey, and it should expand these to report data at sub-regional level. A principle of data collection at the lowest scale should be more widely adopted, even if such data is experimental or limited in scope.

Recommendations

Bringing together these recommendations will enable policymakers to make sense of more complex questions in a way that is not currently possible, such as the trajectory of pride in a particular place, and whether the gap between the top and bottom performing areas is closing on this measure.

Exploring the policy domains identified in the White Paper – regeneration, communities and culture, heritage and sports – this report illustrates how initiatives in these areas can support or undermine feelings of collective local pride. We do not offer a comprehensive discussion of potential policy levers in this area. Were more and better data available on this topic, it would be easier to assess and measure the impact of other policy tools on pride, like improving housing quality or tackling crime in an area. This would enable policymakers to begin to refine their understanding of which themes are best equipped to boost pride, and which mechanism is most appropriate to achieve this. Our following recommendations arise from this policy discussion:

RECOMMENDATION THREE:
INCREASE COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP FUND TO £1 BILLION

There is a fundamental question regarding the scale required to boost pride. The £150 million four-year Community Ownership Fund needs to be scaled up if it is to meet this challenge and government should increase it to £1 billion over this period, part of which should be earmarked for community capacity building to prepare local organisations. On a per capita basis, a £1 billion fund represents a similar scale to the $10 billion Community Revitalisation Fund in the United States.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR:
A 'MINIMUM STANDARD GUARANTEE'

Government should set out a 'Minimum Standard Guarantee' indicating the range and kinds of amenities that it believes are required, at a minimum, to support the social fabric of our towns, cities and rural hinterlands, and which are likely to enhance people's optimism and pride about the places that they live, as well as its prospects.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE:
CREATE A NEW MINISTER FOR CIVIC PRIDE

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should consider creating a new Junior Ministerial role – a Minister for Civic Pride – to co-ordinate actions in relation to this objective. Such an innovation would draw upon emerging local practice: Durham County Council employs a Civic Pride Officer, while the London Borough of Merton has created a Cabinet Member for Civic Pride.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION SIX:
ENSURE THAT REGENERATION INITIATIVES DO MORE TO ADDRESS FEELINGS OF LOCAL PRIDE

There is limited flexibility within the current National Planning Policy Framework to take account of the impact that regeneration programmes have on collective feelings about a place and its prospects. Planning policy currently requires a Local Planning Authority to ensure that regeneration is sympathetic to "local character and history" and this should be extended to include pride in place. Government should explore which options are available to it, including updating the National Planning Policy Framework to include mention of pride in place, and a new impact assessment that considers how regeneration affects it.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN:
GREATER POWERS TO IMPROVE HIGH STREETS

Local institutions and communities should be given the tools to reinvent their high streets. Specifically, we propose that government levels the playing field between bricks-and-mortar and online retailers by making business rates more equitable, and simplifies Compulsory Purchase Order rules, which are currently too costly and resource intensive.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT:
LEGISLATE TO KEEP COMMUNITIES GREEN

A 'green is good' principle should be adopted government-wide and central government should legislate to ensure communities have a legal right of access to nature. Focus should be targeted toward ensuring equal access to natural capital, given that the Fields In Trust's Green Space Index suggests that left-behind places have 10 per cent less green space than their more affluent counterparts. This legislation should also protect existing green spaces which are at risk of being encroached upon by regeneration programmes.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION NINE:
TURBOCHARGE COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Giving communities a greater sense of agency in determining the fortunes of their local communities is closely associated with feelings of pride and place-identity more generally. Government should enshrine community ownership in its legislative programme and make funding available to local authorities so that they have the tools to ensure onward devolution begins at pace. As part of this, local authorities should work with the new Office for Local Government to establish a Community Asset Register.

RECOMMENDATION TEN:
PUT PRIDE ON A STATUTORY FOOTING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Some of the most important factors contributing to feelings of local pride are incorporated within discretionary services run by local authorities, such as arts and culture provision. Government should legislate to put these on a statutory footing and ensure that local authorities receive additional funding to account for these responsibilities. Alongside the Office for Local Government, the government should explore how levels of pride should be reported by local authorities.

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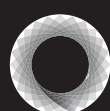
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