



# **“IT'S ALRIGHT IF YOU GET GOOD NEIGHBOURS”**

**A response to the  
ICON Green Paper**

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**CITIZEN  
NETWORK**

FOR A WORLD WHERE  
EVERYONE MATTERS

# DELIVERING NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL

This document is a response to proposals for targeted investments in neighbourhoods to enable their renewal. In summary:

## Community Empowerment

Every neighbourhood has strengths. To build on these strengths for the long-term means giving the lead to neighbourhoods and allowing time. Local authorities will be key partners, facilitating conversations and reshaping local public services so they are ready to work with neighbourhoods. Over time a neighbourhood will gain the ability to act independently and confidently. Residents talk about good neighbours as those who are respectful, who care about the area, who go out of their way to be helpful. Bad neighbours are nosy, noisy, and just think about what they want. **To enable neighbourhood renewal, national, regional, and local government must be good neighbours.**

## Strategy and Scale

A consistent national process can give fair priority to neighbourhoods where there is the greatest opportunity for change. Local and strategic authority resources could also support community-led renewal. The process needs to reflect neighbourhoods that residents actually identify with and recognise neighbourhoods are fuzzy concepts, containing as many different experiences as there are people. Change should grow organically, messily, through making connections and joining up existing resources, then gradually supporting new organisations and capacities to develop. The process should include cross-neighbourhood work and organisations. Over time, **the neighbourhood would be enabled to advocate and act for itself, with place-based budgets and powers in the service of making places and relationships for flourishing lives.**

## Evidence

Evidence can never give a full picture of reality but can reflect some of its complexity. Different kinds of data and rich conversations need to be used in the shaping and evaluation of activities. Neighbourhoods need to be supported not just to produce evidence but also to gather evidence and use it to develop and argue for their needs. Finally, **as much as national, regional and local government need to learn by going to neighbourhoods, so neighbourhoods need to be invited into the processes of government.**

# BACKGROUND

The Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) is a small group set up in 2024 by the national lottery funded charity Local Trust. ICON aims to:

*examine the role of neighbourhoods in people's lives ... exploring the case for neighbourhood focused regeneration as a contribution to achieving wider social and economic objectives.*

As part of this, ICON has published a Green Paper setting out possible plans for putting money into neighbourhoods<sup>1</sup>. The ICON Green Paper gathers together a lot of evidence and sets out possible ways that a big programme of investment in neighbourhoods could work. The Green Paper raises as many questions as it seeks to answer; this paper is a response to those questions and some wider issues raised.

The approach of ICON has been to work within existing government budgets. Our previous response challenged this<sup>2</sup> but we acknowledge the strategy of targeting resources based on the Government's five 'missions':

- Create good jobs, build more houses, and improve living standards;
- Shift to clean energy and net zero emissions;
- Reduce violent crime and improve how the police and courts work;
- Support the ambitions of young people through improved education;
- Help everyone live well for longer through improving the NHS.

These missions have been turned into a measure - the "Hyper-Local Needs Measure" - of how local areas are doing. The priority neighbourhoods with the most needs are called 'mission critical' – without them ICON argue the Government's mission can't succeed.

The focus in our response is on South Yorkshire, exploring what targeting investment in neighbourhoods might mean. We also reflect on the Government proposal to invest in 25 'trailblazer neighbourhoods', including a neighbourhood in Sheffield, and reflect the shift in public services toward place-based work that involves people in neighbourhoods as partners<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/icons-neighbourhood-policy-green-paper-delivering-neighbourhood-renewal-proposals-for-change/](http://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/icons-neighbourhood-policy-green-paper-delivering-neighbourhood-renewal-proposals-for-change/)

<sup>2</sup> See [citizen-network.org/news/a-response-to-the-independent-commission-on-neighbourhoods](http://citizen-network.org/news/a-response-to-the-independent-commission-on-neighbourhoods)

<sup>3</sup> See [www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/projects/do-with](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/projects/do-with)

# THE MISSION CRITICAL LSOAS

The ‘Hyper-local Needs’ measure<sup>4</sup> has been used by ICON to rank small areas in order of priority. There are always difficulties about how to define and prioritise areas – any measure will be contested and different measures could be used<sup>5</sup>. What is important is that **for any round of prioritisation using a standard measure, the measure and allocation of funding is consistent and clear**. If one area gets £20 million and another does not, the reasoning behind the decision needs to be transparent.

The areas used by ICON are Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) from the 2021 census. These are described as “neighbourhoods” by ICON but LSOAs are not really neighbourhoods. They are the smallest standard area at which a range of comparable statistics are available. South Yorkshire is made up of 860 LSOAs and 54 of these are defined as ‘mission critical’ by ICON. This means that 6.3% of LSOAs in South Yorkshire have very high need on the ICON measure. There are large areas, particularly across central southern England, that have no mission critical LSOAs. This is appropriate because regional prospects are uneven. **This should be a national process, where resources are redistributed to neighbourhoods with most barriers to opportunity.**

The four South Yorkshire Authorities already support and undertake a range of innovations that enable neighbourhood renewal; from localised budgets and volunteer support in Barnsley, to place-based neighbourhood partnerships in Doncaster, to asset mapping and co-production in Rotherham, to community health plans and neighbourhood conversations in Sheffield<sup>6</sup>. Whilst local communities need to take a lead, **local authorities will be key partners in facilitation.**

Exploring Mission Critical LSOAs in South Yorkshire indicates that they generally do not reflect recognised neighbourhoods<sup>7</sup>. An initial mapping found

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<sup>4</sup> [www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/hyper-local-need-measure/](http://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/hyper-local-need-measure/)

<sup>5</sup> OCSI have a good blog on this here: [ocsi.uk/2023/08/23/differences-in-deprivation-measures/](https://ocsi.uk/2023/08/23/differences-in-deprivation-measures/) see also our response [citizen-network.org/news/a-response-to-the-independent-commission-on-neighbourhoods](https://citizen-network.org/news/a-response-to-the-independent-commission-on-neighbourhoods)

<sup>6</sup> [citizen-network.org/library/neighbourhood-care-in-south-yorkshire.html](https://citizen-network.org/library/neighbourhood-care-in-south-yorkshire.html)  
[sheffieldcitygoals.uk/](https://sheffieldcitygoals.uk/)

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion in relation to Middle-Layer Super Output Areas and neighbourhoods, see [dataforaction.substack.com/p/neighbourhoods-and-middle-layer-super](https://dataforaction.substack.com/p/neighbourhoods-and-middle-layer-super)



## 36 areas that might be defined as neighbourhoods covering the 54 Mission Critical LSOAs in South Yorkshire<sup>8</sup>.

The limitations of identifying LSOAs as neighbourhoods is recognised by ICON, who argue in the Green Paper that:

*“Ultimately, we believe that definition cannot be imposed from the outside, it needs to be built up within places, with administrative units as a guiding point to begin the conversation, but with local people given control over the final boundaries and scale.” (p.18)*

To explore how this might work, this response focuses on a ‘trailblazer neighbourhood’<sup>9</sup> earmarked for Government investment: Batemoor and Jordanthorpe.

## NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LSOAS

Batemoor and Jordanthorpe are part of “the LBJ area” (Lowedges, Batemoor, Jordanthorpe)<sup>10</sup>, three post-war housing estates on the South of Sheffield. Lowedges was constructed in the 1950s, followed by Batemoor in the mid-1960s, and lastly Jordanthorpe in the late 1960s. The area has been earmarked for Government funding and is also flagged as having ‘mission critical neighbourhoods’ by ICON.

This analysis will look at LSOAs that sit across the “LBJ” area. As Table 1 shows, there are differences between these areas and England as a whole. Both the ONS 2019 “Index of Multiple Deprivation” and ICON’s Hyper-Local Needs Measure show that these LSOA areas have high needs relative to the wider country. A high proportion of people live in social rented housing, particularly in the two ‘mission critical’ areas. Over half (52%) of people in the ‘mission critical’ LSOA 070D have no car and 13.1% of people who could be working were unemployed. All the LSOAs in the LBJ area have higher than average levels of long term illness or disability, being over a third of residents compared to a quarter nationally.

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<sup>8</sup> For Sheffield this used the Sheffield neighbourhoods mapping:

[dataforaction.notion.site/mapping-sheffield-neighbourhoods-phase-2](https://dataforaction.notion.site/mapping-sheffield-neighbourhoods-phase-2)

For the other South Yorkshire authorities standard geographic area names were used.

<sup>9</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-announces-25-trailblazer-neighbourhoods-to-receive-long-term-investment/](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-announces-25-trailblazer-neighbourhoods-to-receive-long-term-investment/)

<sup>10</sup> [www.sheffieldtribune.co.uk/april-is-the-cruellest-month-for/](https://www.sheffieldtribune.co.uk/april-is-the-cruellest-month-for/)

**Table 1**      **LSOAs with selected statistics<sup>11</sup>**

Area	HLNM Rank	IMD rank	16 or over	Unem- ployed	Social rented	No car
070D (Batemoor)	321	648	73.6%	13.1%	65.3%	52.0%
070B (Jordanthorpe)	563	1,106	81.9%	8.9%	58.1%	47.9%
070C (Lowedges)	667	958	75.7%	11.7%	51.1%	43.4%
070A (Jordanthorpe)	1,348	2,226	82.1%	9.2%	51.4%	40.5%
069B (Lowedges)	2,351	2,147	73.3%	9.8%	57.5%	49.2%
069C (Lowedges)	2,169	1,993	74.1%	9.2%	56.4%	48.2%
England	16,877	16,422	81.4%	4.9%	17.1%	23.5%

As Figure 2 below illustrates, the LSOAs only roughly fit onto places that people would recognise. The ‘Mission Critical’ LSOA of Sheffield 070B maps onto half of Jordanthorpe along with parts of Batemoor and Lowedges. The Sheffield 070D LSOA maps onto most of Batemoor but also with some of Lowedges. Lowedges contains an LSOA with higher needs (070C) than 070A (mainly in Jordanthorpe).

Each LSOA area contains around 750 households with 1,500 people living in them. Unsurprisingly there is considerable variation within each LSOA. For example, crime levels were high across “LBJ” relative to neighbouring districts<sup>12</sup>. However, online discussions reflect the opinion “it’s alright if you get good neighbours”, with crime typically localised around streets or even smaller areas<sup>13</sup>. Variation is also evident in other statistics. For example, within the Lowedges LSOA of 070C was a small area with the highest rate of unemployment (15% amongst economically active residents) whilst a small area in the ‘mission critical’ LSOA 070B had the lowest (3%)<sup>14</sup>. This variation and spread of need suggests that **the definition of priority areas and actions should not be constrained by the geography of the LSOA.**

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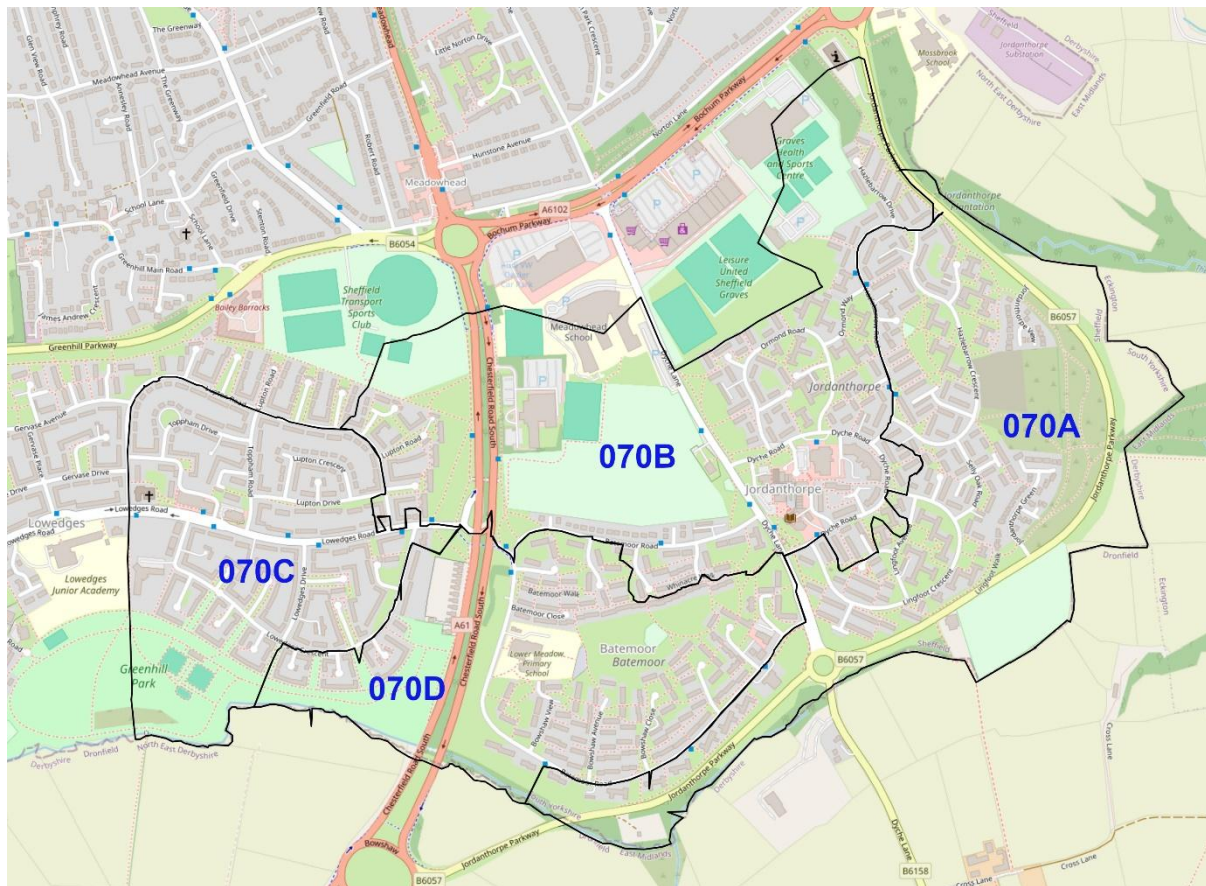
<sup>11</sup> HLNM and IMD 2019 rank for England is the middle-point, other statistics are 2021 census data from Nomis.

<sup>12</sup> [www.southyorkshire.police.uk/area/your-area/south-yorkshire/sheffield/sheffield-south-west/about-us/crime-map](https://www.southyorkshire.police.uk/area/your-area/south-yorkshire/sheffield/sheffield-south-west/about-us/crime-map)

<sup>13</sup> [www.college.police.uk/research/what-works-policing-reduce-crime/people-and-places](https://www.college.police.uk/research/what-works-policing-reduce-crime/people-and-places)

<sup>14</sup> Analysis of 2021 census ‘Output Area’ results on economic activity for E00040922 (15% unemployed of 151 people) and E00040923 (3% unemployed of 116 people).

**Figure 2: the area of Batemoor, Jordanthorpe and Lowedges, with LSOAs including ‘Mission Critical’ LSOAs of Sheffield 070B and 070D (Nomis 2025).**



LSOAs are one just one possible grouping of streets and apartment blocks. If we defined the LSOA another way we might have found an LSOA in Lowedges appeared ‘Mission Critical’<sup>15</sup>. We could have more confidence that needs would be addressed if the whole LBJ area could receive investment. However, the ICON Green Paper states that the local population should “define their key target area within an LSOA” (p.18) and asks “How should we prioritise areas within the 613 mission critical neighbourhoods?” (p.21). But there is not any meaningful neighbourhood *within* the Mission Critical LSOAs. Rather than attempt to identify very small areas, which will have correspondingly fewer resources to leverage change, **investment should connect with broader neighbourhoods and the opportunity this offers**. For example, the Big Local programme gained significant benefits from investments of around £1 million across an average of 5 LSOAs – usually covering multiple neighbourhoods<sup>16</sup>.

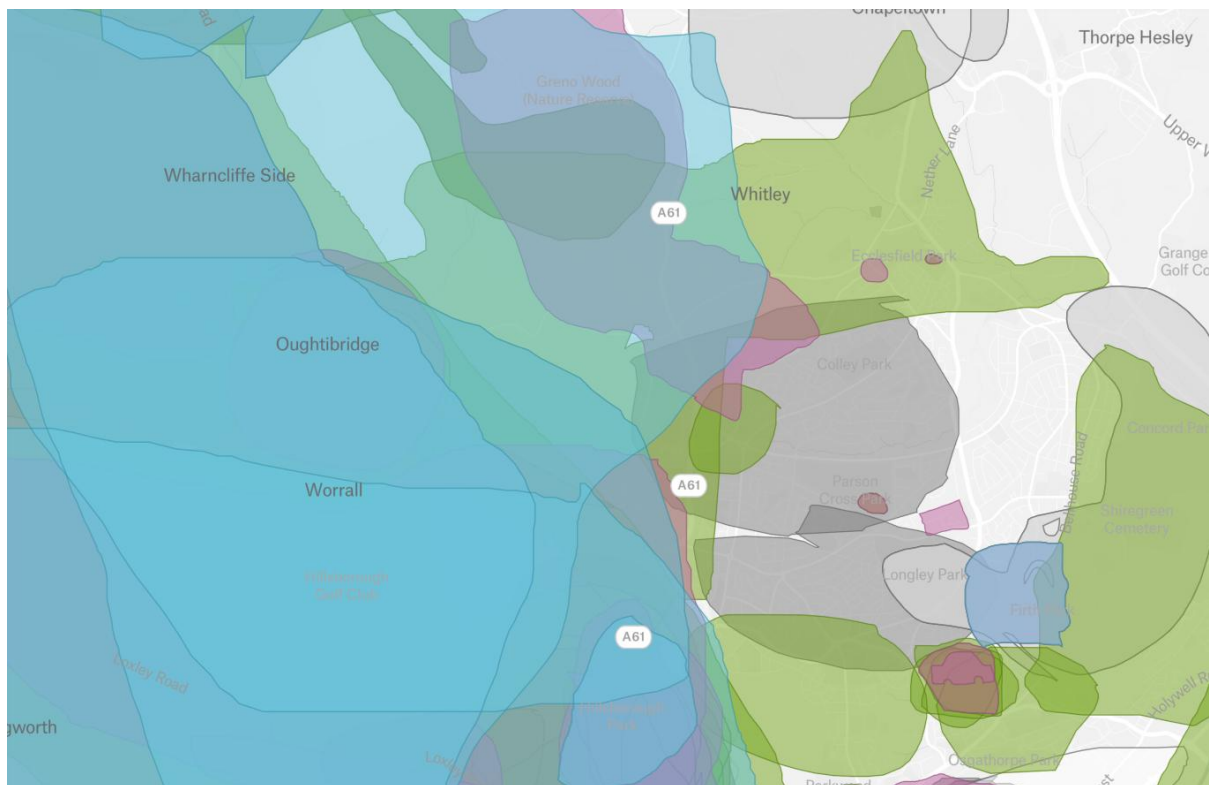
<sup>15</sup> This is a well-known in geography as the ‘Modifiable Areal Unit Problem’, see [journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1068/a231025](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1068/a231025)

<sup>16</sup> [www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/progress-and-pressure-understanding-economic-and-social-change-in-englands-neighbourhoods/](https://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/progress-and-pressure-understanding-economic-and-social-change-in-englands-neighbourhoods/), technical appendix, p.2. Also, for example, [snaptincommunityhub.co.uk/](https://snaptincommunityhub.co.uk/)

# WHAT IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD FOR?

The Public First research evidencing viewpoints on neighbourhoods for ICON found that what people meant by neighbourhoods varies widely<sup>17</sup>. In Sheffield an iterative process has been happening over the past year to explore how people define their neighbourhoods. Figure 3 shows a sample of a map coloured by people's interests: for example, blue for music, green for health and wellbeing, pink for sport. **How we describe our 'neighbourhood' depends on what we are thinking about.**

**Figure 3: Detail of Sheffield map of neighbourhoods drawn by residents, coloured according to topic of interest (Data for Action<sup>18</sup>).**



In thinking about renewal driven by neighbourhoods, we need to think about the civic and social infrastructure that would enable people to flourish. This means a neighbourhood with the capacity to build diverse networks of care and support, personal development, and leisure. It means connection to physical spaces, such as schools, community centres, parks, and GPs.

<sup>17</sup> [www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/public-first-independent-commission-on-neighbourhoods-opinion-research-summary/](http://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/public-first-independent-commission-on-neighbourhoods-opinion-research-summary/)

<sup>18</sup> [dataforaction.notion.site/Phase-1-outputs-20397dba92c5802aa85de5faef762a74](https://dataforaction.notion.site/Phase-1-outputs-20397dba92c5802aa85de5faef762a74), see also [placematters.org.uk/stories/poverty-place-and-power-in-northumberland-park/](http://placematters.org.uk/stories/poverty-place-and-power-in-northumberland-park/)



**Experience has found around 4000 to 5000 people (or around three or four LSOAs) is an appropriate scale** to organise mutual aid and coordinate professional services in urban areas. At this scale there is an average of:

- one primary school and half a GP;
- 10 social workers and 8 community nurses;
- £7 million of existing unpaid care and £7.5 million of NHS spending;
- £2.8 million of Social Care and £15 million additional citizen capacity<sup>19</sup>.

How an appropriate neighbourhood is defined will depend on geography, context, and how people identify and live their lives. There will be actions and initiatives as part of this that could happen at smaller or larger scales as appropriate. However, a recognised neighbourhood gives an opportunity to develop and organise activity with a sense of belonging and purpose.

## IN THE SERVICE OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The recent ICON study on what works for neighbourhood renewal argues for:

*long-term investment; local control over decision-making; and a deliberate effort to build confidence, capacity, and civic life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods*<sup>20</sup>.

This principle is worth highlighting because it is an excellent summation of what is required. Some people in neighbourhoods will have struggled for years. Local people may have deep scepticism with and disengagement from public bodies. There is a risk that the Government will want immediate results, and that frameworks, priorities and models will be imposed on the neighbourhood from outside (for example, p.29, pp33-35 of the Green Paper could be interpreted in this light). Instead, there needs to be “the possibility of change that is held out, bravely, without instructions, targets or theory”<sup>21</sup> a freedom to innovate is a need to work with neighbourhoods to design. This may be measured by how the ‘mission critical’ LSOAs change but activity should not be defined by specific targets or their geography. **For an ambitious programme of neighbourhood renewal to succeed, it must be locally directed and allow time for change.**

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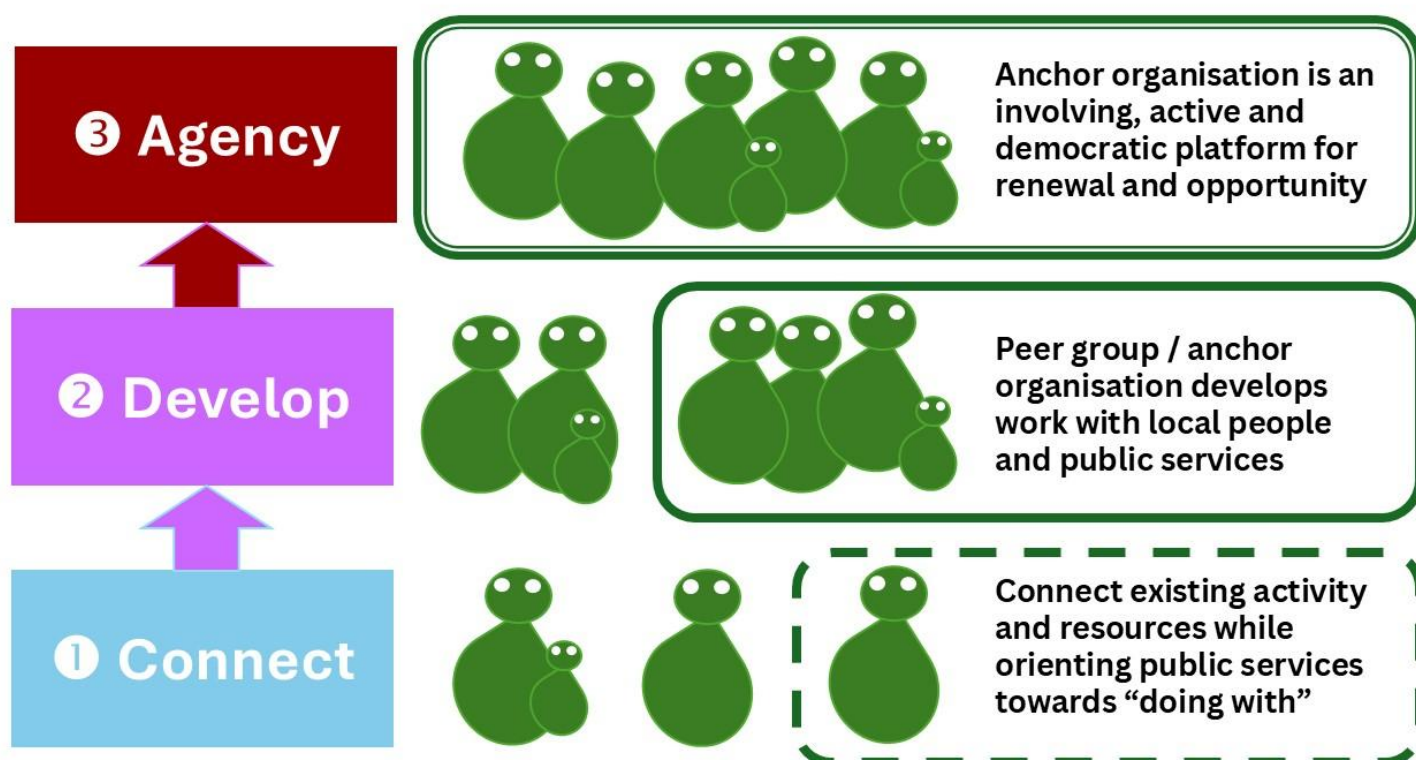
<sup>19</sup> [citizen-network.org/library/neighbourhood-care-in-south-yorkshire.html](http://citizen-network.org/library/neighbourhood-care-in-south-yorkshire.html)

<sup>20</sup> p.25, [www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/progress-and-pressure-understanding-economic-and-social-change-in-englands-neighbourhoods/](http://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/report/progress-and-pressure-understanding-economic-and-social-change-in-englands-neighbourhoods/)

<sup>21</sup> p.53, [localtrust.org.uk/insights/essays/the-grammar-of-change-an-essay-by-david-boyle/](http://localtrust.org.uk/insights/essays/the-grammar-of-change-an-essay-by-david-boyle/)

This response argues for an ‘outcomes-based’ approach rooted in Asset Based Community Development and relational public services<sup>22</sup>.

**Figure 4: A proposed overall model for investing in neighbourhoods**



**Connect.** Start with what residents can do themselves, providing facilitation and meeting critical support needs for existing networks / assets. This period should build trusting relationships between residents on activities that might be ambitious or small-scale. Public services present in the area need to explore how they can orient towards working alongside residents.

**Develop.** After residents have developed networks and explored existing assets, explore how a little outside help can facilitate positive change, recognising local ownership and leadership. Find ‘win-win’ opportunities between community oriented public services and the residents group.

**Agency.** Once local assets have been fully connected and mobilized, support residents to develop the formal governance structures needed to negotiate substantial investments and maintain independent activity. This structure acts as a platform for renewal: commissioning services; initiating networks of care; and supporting further community organising.

<sup>22</sup> See [citizen-network.org/library/4-essential-elements-of-abcd-process.html](https://citizen-network.org/library/4-essential-elements-of-abcd-process.html), [citizen-network.org/library/the-relational-basis-of-empowerment.html](https://citizen-network.org/library/the-relational-basis-of-empowerment.html)

Proposals in the Green Paper for a National Analysis Excellence Centre have the potential to improve available evidence and information about priority neighbourhoods. However, **the process of evaluation needs to be co-created with neighbourhoods and meet their needs for self-development and understanding**. Reflection on impact and how an organisation is doing is critical for successful development. Evidence needs to be made easily accessible so that residents and organisations within neighbourhoods can use it effectively alongside their own experience and reflections.

## STRENGTH IN BATEMOOR AND JORDANTHORPE

**Although containing two ‘Mission Critical’ LSOAs (Sheffield 007B and D) and others that are ‘Mission Priority’, Batemoor and Jordanthorpe have a lot that is already strong.** The Batemoor and Jordanthorpe Community Centre is one focal point of this strength. Hosting several groups the centre offers cheap meals and a warm space for local people. Another important community space is the volunteer run Jordanthorpe library, which offers book loaning, computers and WiFi, citizens advice, social activities, and refreshments. Batemoor & Jordanthorpe has a Tenants and Residents Association, which aims to connect and advocate for local people. The Terminus Initiative and the Meadowhead Christian Fellowship are two local church-based initiatives that operate across the “LBJ” area and offer a number of regular groups. The organisations also link members with other activities in the area and host the Grace Food Bank, based in Lowedges, which offers support for people across the LBJ area in food poverty. Demand for the food bank has witnessed a severe increase in recent years<sup>23</sup>. Greener Greenhill, a neighbouring environmental and nature group, has organised a repair café in Jordanthorpe alongside other activities in the area.

There are, therefore, several local organisations that connect, empower and support people to develop, aside from informal local networks and social media groups. Key enabling spaces for civic infrastructure exist in both Batemoor and Jordanthorpe but also act across and beyond the “LBJ” area. However, this activity is against a backdrop of falling funding and increasing need, with some valued local services feeling isolated and precarious.

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<sup>23</sup> [www.church-poverty.org.uk/sheffield-civic-breakfast-leaders-told-about-mounting-pressures-of-poverty/](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sheffield-civic-breakfast-leaders-told-about-mounting-pressures-of-poverty/)

## Step 1: Connecting

Through recruiting local or external community organisers, the first step would be to convene those people who are already connected. This includes the organisations and people who are known to link up the neighbourhood.

**The inclusion of people from all backgrounds and from across the area is critical.** The initial focus might be on Batemoor and Jordanthorpe but, given shared civic infrastructure with Lowedges could produce mutual benefits, residents may wish to expand this focus. This conversation could use mapping of local boundaries and assets to support ongoing discussion<sup>24</sup>. Given the precarious position of local organisations, funding should be made immediately available to protect what is already strong. At this stage, a peer-group may develop in each area or work across neighbourhoods. Public services would review how they could shift to a place-based relational model, alongside strengthening communication with local groups.

The potential impact of peer-support is well demonstrated by People Focused Group in Doncaster. This group, where ‘everyone is a member and a peer supporter’, shares support, skills, and help each other. Themed support is available from peers around health, poverty, parenthood, growing up and more<sup>25</sup>. The group works across Doncaster, including in ‘mission critical’ LSOAs, and is nationally recognised for their work. People Focused Group has been increasingly commissioned to bridge the gap between formal services and local people. This approach would fail if an external body tried to drive it<sup>26</sup>, **the drive for renewal needs to come first from residents.**

## Step 2: Development

A second step would be to explore opportunities to further connect and grow, with resources on hand to help if needed. This is a role currently taken by public bodies, who contract services or otherwise fund local organisations. In Barnsley **volunteering activity has been leveraged through the investment to a social value far greater than the spend**<sup>27</sup>. Government investment would enable the resident group to directly draw down and allocate funding. Batemoor and Jordanthorpe have physical spaces for community but these

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<sup>24</sup> See [dataforaction.notion.site/mapping-sheffield-neighbourhoods-phase-2](https://dataforaction.notion.site/mapping-sheffield-neighbourhoods-phase-2)

<sup>25</sup> [peoplefocused.org.uk/library/how-we-deliver-peer-support](https://peoplefocused.org.uk/library/how-we-deliver-peer-support)

<sup>26</sup> For example, [www.right-here.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/WRH-polling-devolution-and-community-power-Feb-2025.-09.04.25.pdf](https://www.right-here.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/WRH-polling-devolution-and-community-power-Feb-2025.-09.04.25.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> [citizen-network.org/library/heading-upstream1.html](https://citizen-network.org/library/heading-upstream1.html)



would likely need expanding or upgrading. New spaces, such as for young people, should be co-designed from the start so that there is a sense of ownership of and belonging in these spaces, whatever form they take<sup>28</sup>. Community spaces could offer opportunities for hosting local organisations and social enterprise. At the same time, public bodies would be working alongside residents, involving and forming relationships to support better lives<sup>29</sup>, and collaborating with the peer group. The potential for ‘win-wins’ should be explored, such as public service professionals having space for hot-desking, giving them a local base and enabling place-based conversations.

Whilst locally directed, peer group members would need to reflect on the impact of the group activities and how it has been inclusive and thoughtful in its actions. Peer learning from other places would support success. In every area there are examples to learn from. For example, in South Yorkshire: the Snap Tin Community Hub in Barnsley; the Eastwood People's Initiative in Rotherham; the Manor and Castle Development Trust in Sheffield; Flourish Woodfield Park in Doncaster. As neighbourhoods develop, more peer-learning and sharing of experience would support the development of those involved.

## Step 3: Agency

The final step would be to move towards a more formal neighbourhood governance structure of an anchor organisation that could draw-in and administer investment in future years. The existing civic infrastructure suggests one governance structure covering Batemoor and Jordanthorpe and another covering Lowedges, but this may change as organisations and networks develop. Strong anchor organisations, such as a Community Benefit Society and/or Community Council (with the same powers as a parish council)<sup>30</sup>, could **facilitate area-based working and neighbourhood budgeting, alongside ensuring democratic oversight and sustained community flourishing**. Such a structure would also enable residents to play a stronger role in shaping their place, through considering how future generations will live in the area and the construction of a Neighbourhood Plan.

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<sup>28</sup> See the example of the Westfield Big Local Community centre in Sheffield, co-designed with local children, [localtrust.org.uk/insights/essays/counterweight/](https://localtrust.org.uk/insights/essays/counterweight/) <https://localtrust.org.uk/news-and-stories/blog/westfield-community-hub/>

<sup>29</sup> See [www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/relational-public-service-can-tackle-hardship-in-neighbourhoods](http://www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/relational-public-service-can-tackle-hardship-in-neighbourhoods),

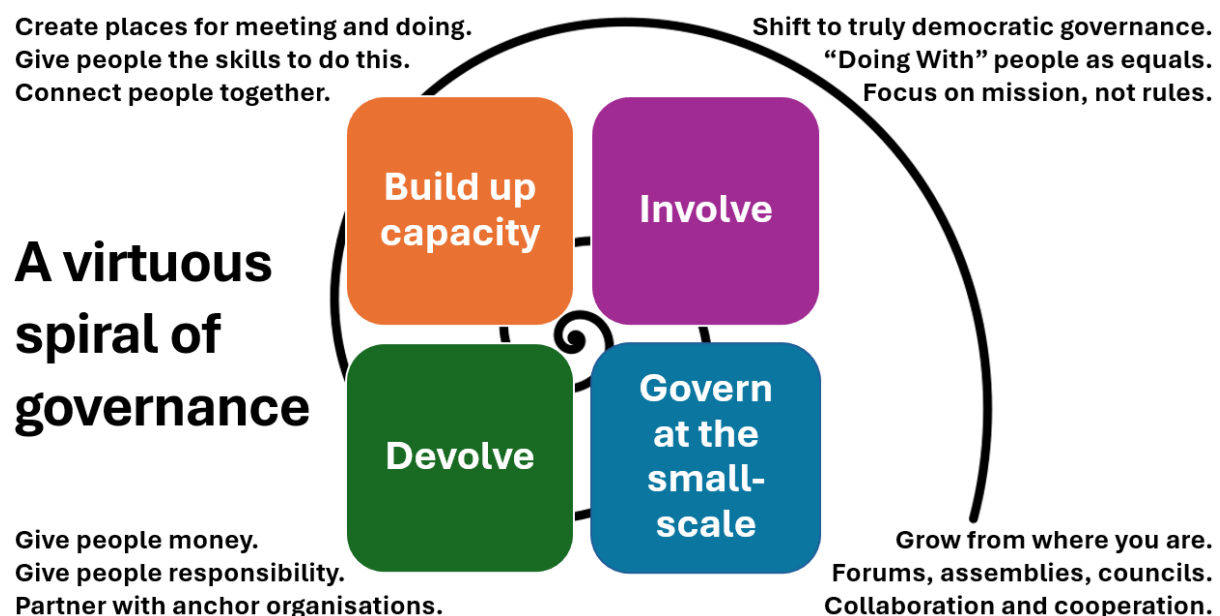
<sup>30</sup> For example, [citizen-network.org/library/coalville-certainly-can.html](http://citizen-network.org/library/coalville-certainly-can.html), [queensparkcommunitycouncil.gov.uk/](http://queensparkcommunitycouncil.gov.uk/)

The ICON Green Paper proposals of a ‘Neighbourhood Respect Duty’, a ‘Neighbourhood Right to Control’, and a ‘Right To Request’ would reinforce the role of neighbourhoods. However, strong local institutions could themselves control neighbourhood budgets, commission expertise as needed and hold local funds for social return on investment. For example, residents in Batemoor have spoken about their frustrations with housing renewal<sup>31</sup>. A Community Council could have its own team or locally contract to undertake minor repairs and upgrades quickly. A Neighbourhood Plan combined with a local planning officer would allow residents meaningful influence over how strategic development lands in the area. **Local agency would mean neighbourhoods could act and advocate without needing to be reliant on external processes and bureaucracy.**

## NEIGHBOURS VS MISSION TRAILBLAZERS

The language used in these plans – ‘mission critical’, ‘trailblazing’, ‘hyper-local needs’ – should not obscure that there are people at the heart of this. People with complex, messy, ordinary lives, as we all have. **Any investment in neighbourhoods needs to be neighbourly – to be helpful, friendly, respectful of other people’s views and ownership, and give time.**

*Figure 5: A virtuous spiral of governance builds up capacity<sup>32</sup>*



<sup>31</sup> [www.sheffieldtribune.co.uk/after-a-decade-of-neglect-can-batemoor-hope-again](http://www.sheffieldtribune.co.uk/after-a-decade-of-neglect-can-batemoor-hope-again)

<sup>32</sup> See Rolfe, S. (2016) ‘Divergence in Community Participation Policy: Analysing Localism and Community Empowerment Using a Theory of Change Approach’, *Local government studies*, 42(1), pp. 97–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2015.1081848>.

The Green Paper states that “initiatives to transform neighbourhoods can take a decade, sometimes several decades, to achieve results” (p.47). As shown in Figure 5, the building of civic capacity (meeting spaces, skills to organise, etc) supports involvement and people working with public services and peers, which in turn builds capacity for making local decisions and shifting powers to the neighbourhood, which enables the taking on of more assets and money, which enables further building of civic capacity, and so on. A national coordinating body or ‘Neighbourhoods Commissioner’ could advocate for **the slow neighbourly time spent building low-level activities and networks, which will be rewarded by the long-term flourishing of neighbourhoods.**

The Green Paper states that “Government should not look at mission critical neighbourhoods as a demand on the public sector and public services, but as a source of opportunity” (p.7). The process of prioritisation inevitably risks a conversation about deficits rather than strengths. **The framing of neighbourhoods as places of opportunity needs to be woven through the process.** However, limiting these opportunities to particular areas is questionable given how social and civic infrastructure, and socio-economic needs, do not respect statistical or neighbourhood boundaries. Opportunities for renewal exist in every neighbourhood. Given the returns on even modest investment illustrated by Big Local, **impactful community-led neighbourhood renewal could be effectively backed everywhere, and not just by national government but by strategic and local authorities.**

Citizen Network welcomes the ICON Green Paper and deeply appreciates the work of the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods. The continuation through a Commissioner for Neighbourhoods or similar would be welcome to maintain focus and enable independent scrutiny of other Government functions that seek to drive neighbourhood renewal. A commission should have on its governing body roles that would involve people within communities that are, or have been, the focus of activity. If government at the national, regional and local level is to be informed about the activity in neighbourhoods, **it needs not just to reach out to neighbourhoods but bring those within neighbourhoods into their processes and deliberations.**

To acknowledge that we are all neighbours.

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Any errors and omissions are my own.

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**Citizen Network** works to connect and support global efforts to build communities that welcome, support and activate full and meaningful citizenship for everyone. we treat someone as a fellow citizen when we welcome them into our community in a spirit of equality.  
Everyone can be an equal citizen.



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