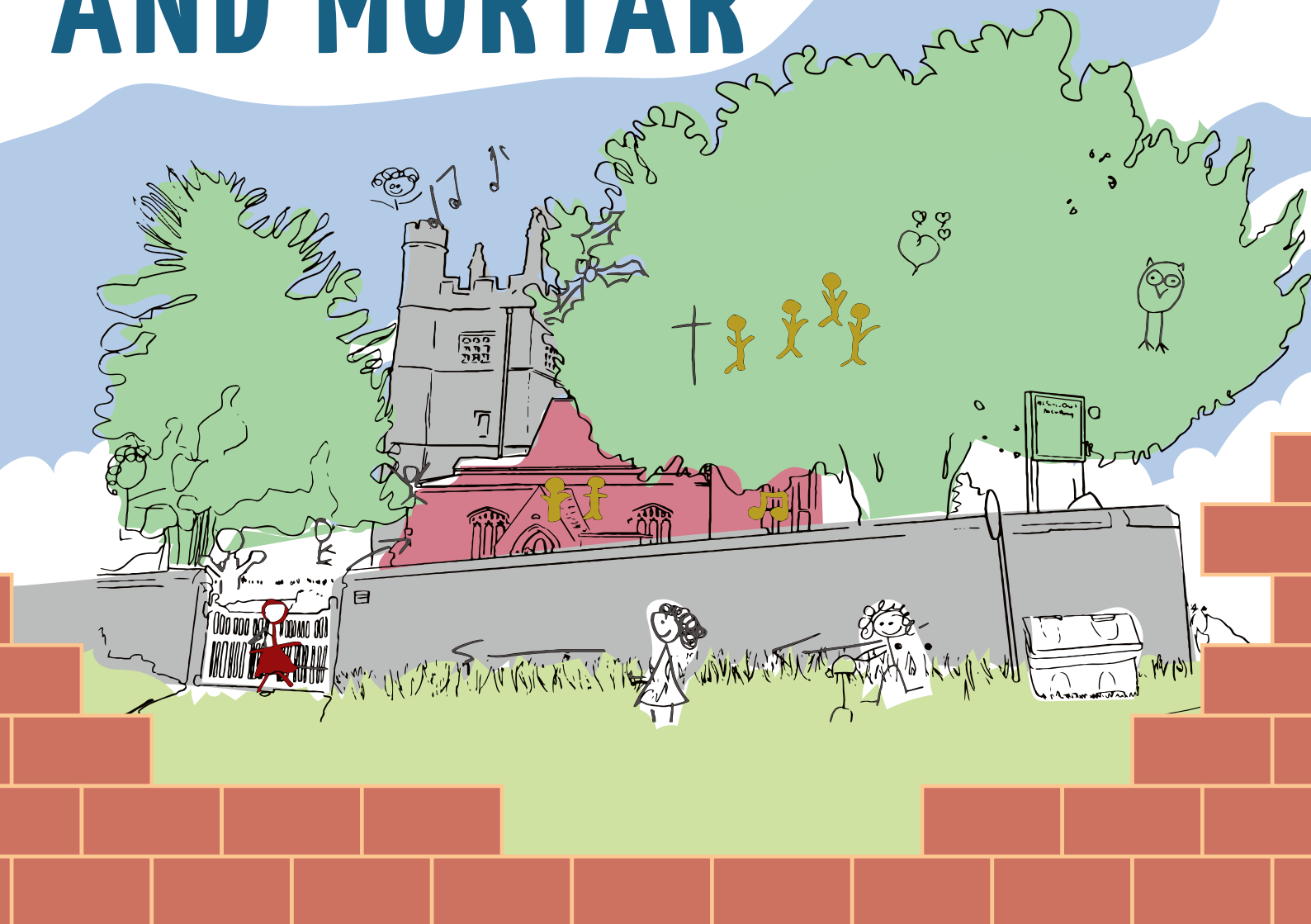


# BEYOND BRICKS AND MORTAR



## Results and Recommendations of the NxtGen Community Researcher Training Programme in Barton Stacey and Lockerley

### Authors

Sofaer, J., Awasthi, A., Parsons, H., Ryan, M., Bannister, J., May, N., May, P., Sargent, I., Walsh, J., Risley, K., Roberts, T., Somanje, C., Black, C., Leonard, N., Ramos-Bonilla, G., Nellikkal, M., Nisya, C., Trivedi, A., Brain, J., Stubbington, M., Spada, P., Woods-Townsend, K., Barker, M.

## FUNDING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Beyond Bricks and Mortar* was funded through the University of Southampton's Research England Participatory Research Fund in partnership with Test Valley Borough Council.

This work has been made possible through the contributions of many people and organisations. We would like to thank:

Residents of Barton Stacey and Lockerley

Test Valley Borough Council

Parish Councillors, Parish Church Councillors, Borough Councillors and County Councillors representing residents in Barton Stacey and Lockerley

University of Southampton Civic Team

Cover image based on data collected by community researcher Nina May



# Community Researchers

**Jenny Bannister** lives in Lockerley with her husband and son. She moved to the village 2 years ago from a more urban environment. She is interested in taking part in something to benefit the village and has personally found power cuts and the lack of ability to make a phone call challenging on occasion! Hence, she has been researching community resilience and how power cuts affect people living in Lockerley.

**Nina May** has lived in Barton Stacey for the past 4 years. She took part in this research project because she thought it wonderful and fascinating to get an opportunity to follow her curiosity into one aspect of what makes the village tick. Drawing on her own experiences as a newcomer who struggled to make friends and feel as though she belonged, she has explored social connectedness in this beautiful, historic little corner of the world.

**Phil May** is a recently retired primary school teacher and has been a resident in Lockerley for the past 11 years. He believes the strength of a village is its community. Phil has invested in Lockerley in a number of ways; as a Beaver and Scout leader since 2019 and as a committee member responsible for re-establishing the Lockerley Village Fete. He helps with village fun runs and charity events such as walks and quiz nights. He has been delighted to continue this investment by undertaking research with the young people of Lockerley.

**Izzy Sargent** is a researcher at the University of Southampton, and is just starting her journey in Social Sciences. She is keen to improve her abilities in gathering insights from people about their lives and communities and she is inspired to honour the research started by Jacqueline Rider. Her research explores what are the cherished and challenging aspects of life in Lockerley, and considers both places and the seasons.

**Jim Walsh** has a keen interest in the health and development of Lockerley village and understands the needs and wants of the community. Having previously worked in both hospitality and service industries, he can build rapport quickly and ensures engagement with people from all walks of life. His research has focused on oral history, to better understand what can be learnt about pride and heritage from residents retelling stories of Lockerley that are within living memory.

# Table of Contents

## **1. Introduction**

## **2. Context**

### **2.1** TVBC's Rural Offer

### **2.2** The Importance of Place Perception

### **2.3** Linking NxtGen to TVBC Priorities and Place Perception

### **2.4** Places in this Research

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1** NxtGen Community Researcher Training Programme

### **3.2** Community Researcher Recruitment

### **3.3** Delivery of the NxtGen Training Programme

### **3.4** Development of Research Questions within a TVBC Context

### **3.5** Data Collection

### **3.6** Data Analysis and Presentation

### **3.7** Research to Recommendations Workshop

## **4. Research Results and Recommendations**

### **4.1** Understanding the difficulties created by power cuts for elderly residents in Lockerley. How are villagers affected by power cuts? How much resilience is there when these happen?

### **4.2** Understanding the role of village stories in connecting residents of Lockerley to the village. What do villagers take pride in and what makes the village special to them?



# Table of Contents

- 4.3** What do the children of Lockerley notice about their village?
- 4.4** Exploring social connectedness in Barton Stacey: The impact of clubs and social spaces on the wellbeing of rural community inhabitants.
- 4.5** What matters in the village of Lockerley? How do residents perceive the place where they live?
- 4.6** How do residents of Barton Stacey and Lockerley understand, define and express the value of the place where they live?
- 4.7** How do residents perceive temporal change in their village?
- 4.8** What makes people proud of the place where they live? What emotional and cultural values do residents attach to their places?
- 4.9** What represents village identity in Barton Stacey and Lockerley?
- 5. Recommendations and Outcomes of Deliberative Engagement**
  - 5.1** Recommendation: Create and maintain a central village information register to support vulnerable residents in an emergency
  - 5.2** Recommendation: Facilitate sports provision in Lockerley and access to it
  - 5.3** Recommendation: Help communities to create and sustain their own community hub
  - 5.4** Recommendation: Hear the voices of all residents by using multi-layered approaches to information gathering
  - 5.5** Recommendation: Diversify opportunities for civic engagement, particularly in light of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and embed borough councillors and parish councillors within the communities they represent
- 6. Conclusion**
- Appendix 1:** Long List of Co-Produced Recommendations

# 1. Introduction

The English Devolution White Paper sets out a plan for Local Government Reorganisation aimed at redistributing power and resources from the centre to local level through the creation of larger unitary authorities.<sup>1</sup> While this presents risks in disconnecting people from decisions, it also presents a unique opportunity to establish new structures and processes based on citizen insight at the hyperlocal level that support civic engagement.<sup>2</sup> In particular, The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill,

*“will introduce a requirement on all local authorities, in England, to establish effective neighbourhood governance. The main goal of neighbourhood governance is to move decision-making closer to residents, so decisions are made by people who understand local needs. Additionally, developing neighbourhood-based approaches will provide opportunities to organise public services to meet local needs better.”<sup>3</sup>*

**This approach is accompanied by a challenge: How to build capacity in communities so that residents can engage confidently and effectively in evidence-led neighbourhood governance?**

Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) has a longstanding commitment to inclusive community engagement and decision-making. This commitment is grounded in the recognition that rural communities across Test Valley possess distinct identities, aspirations, geographies, histories, and challenges that require place-based, participatory approaches.<sup>4</sup> Like many rural councils, TVBC faces the question of how to balance sustainable rural growth and development, including mandated housing delivery, with the preservation of place-based identity, community cohesion, and quality of life. TVBC identifies participatory approaches as a means of addressing this question and strengthening local democracy. Its Rural Offer explicitly emphasises the importance of inclusive community engagement and supporting villages and rural communities to plan for their future development and housing needs, ensuring that decisions are informed by a full range of voices.<sup>5</sup> Initiatives such as citizens' assemblies, a neighbourhood planning officer, local community engagement officers, a community planning toolkit and community grants aim to enable and empower residents as active agents of change in their own communities.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd, J. and Cline, G. 2025. *“The bigger you go, the less you know”: Why place-based, relational approaches to public services must be core to Local Government Reorganisation.* Collaborate CiC.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-bill-guidance/english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-bill-guidance>

<sup>4</sup> Test Valley Corporate Plan 2023. *A place for everyone - supporting our communities to thrive.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://democracy.testvalley.gov.uk/documents/s34534/Rural%20Offer%20-%20Annex%201.pdf>; <https://democracy.testvalley.gov.uk/documents/s34535/Rural%20Offer%20-%20Annex%202.pdf>

Yet many communities struggle with planning for the future. Residents may not feel confident or equipped to contribute. Furthermore, whilst democratic engagement and consultation are essential to participatory governance and decision-making, they are often constrained by existing institutionalised frameworks and processes which can feel opaque, formal, and difficult to access. This creates a persistent power imbalance between those making decisions and people for whom decisions are being made. In Test Valley, formal consultations, whether led by the Borough Council or by parishes developing neighbourhood plans or village design statements, may therefore feel limiting and disconnected from the everyday realities and concerns of residents. They can also lose quiet voices.

Realising a commitment to place-based decision-making for localised service delivery in the context of Local Government Reorganisation demands that effective policy must be grounded in place-based insight and community voice at a scale with which people identify.<sup>6</sup>

**In order to move beyond a promise of inclusion, a shift is needed from consultation to co-production. In turn, this requires the practice of partnership, including generation of robust data at the hyperlocal level to ensure that evidence-based priorities emerge from communities, rather than being imposed upon them.**

In response, the University of Southampton designed and delivered a programme of collaborative research with TVBC in 2024-2025. The research was framed within this space of tension and distance in democratic engagement and community planning, allied to TVBC's desire to further establish informed strategies for capacity building that lead to positive change for residents. It sought to explore whether equipping residents with research skills could ground local decision-making in community-generated evidence that fosters targeted, constructive dialogue.

**The NxtGen Community Researcher Training Programme (NxtGen) lay at the heart of the research.** NxtGen was conceived at the University of Southampton to centre and amplify traditionally quiet local voices. It arose out of the recognition that **meaningful research that will benefit local communities needs community members to tell us what is important to them, to decide what the research should be, how it should be carried out, and how it should be communicated. Furthermore, community members are often able to speak to people who would not usually engage with parish or council officers.**

Rather than consulting on pre-set agendas, **NxtGen equips residents with the tools and confidence to explore issues that matter. It trains residents to generate their own evidence, investigate concerns rooted in lived experience, and present findings in ways that directly inform local strategy and decision-making.** It is a form of community participation that integrates and prioritises creative and relational practices such as co-production, participatory research and dialogue.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd, J. and Cline, G. 2025. *"The bigger you go, the less you know". Why place-based, relational approaches to public services must be core to Local Government Reorganisation.* Collaborate CiC

Citizens become researchers who are skilled in designing studies, collecting and analysing data, interpreting findings, and presenting their work to stakeholders and members of the public. **This model builds capacity within communities, transforming citizens from observers into active agents of change and ensuring that development debates are informed not only by policy, but by lived experience.** It improves the visibility of the choices people collectively face, and local authorities must make, and empowers local people to stake a claim in the places that they live. It furthers approaches to community power and asset-based community development <sup>7</sup> by creating the conditions through which this can be delivered.

In the context of this project, community research focused on place perception in the villages of Barton Stacey and Lockerley. Asking people directly about rural development and the future of their places can create significant anxiety and reduce (rather than enhance) their sense of agency. Furthermore, residents may be wary or uncertain about how to embark on community planning. Place perception underpins people's attitudes to their local environment. **Understanding how people feel about the places they live - including what they value and what they want to change - is a vital first step in supporting communities to make plans for their future.**

Community researchers used a variety of accessible creative methods, in addition to surveys and interviews, to explore the past, present and future of their villages. In rural areas communities are protective of their environment but also want or need facilities and amenities. They found that **new development is rarely just about buildings. It is also about identity, belonging, memory, social relationships and how these are connected to the future of the village. Natural and cultural heritage are vital to understanding these place-based values, supporting wellbeing, community cohesion and resilience, and to understanding why residents may be nervous of change.** Space holds social as well as physical meaning.

Places need to evolve, react and grow, but decisions need to be based on understanding and evidence.<sup>8</sup> **NxtGen emerged as a vehicle to assist communities in determining their future development by fostering the generation of evidence to support individual agency and local ownership.** As a method of co-creation and co-production, **it also created opportunities for meaningful dialogue, trust-building, and establishing connections between residents, parish councils, and local government.**

The results and recommendations in this report support place-based decision-making across scales of governance in the Test Valley for housing, community wellbeing, cohesion and resilience. Rather than relying solely on top-down consultation, **NxtGen empowered communities to articulate their priorities with clarity and confidence, helping to shape local futures in ways that are informed, collaborative, and rooted in place.**

<sup>7</sup> Russell, C. (2025). Exploring the Potential of Community-Centred Public Services. New Local [https://www.newlocal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Community-Centred-Public-Services\\_New-Thinking.pdf](https://www.newlocal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Community-Centred-Public-Services_New-Thinking.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Clark, K. (2021). 'Power of Place-Heritage Policy at the Start of the New Millennium', in *Engaging with Heritage and Historic Environment Policy*. Routledge.

# 2. Context

## 2.1 TVBC's Rural Offer

About a quarter of Test Valley's 130,500 population lives in rural communities. Of the Borough's rural population, around one in four people is retired, and almost twenty percent of the Borough's rural residents are under eighteen. Around three-quarters of Test Valley's rural population own their own homes. Only 10 out of 59 parishes currently have Neighbourhood Plans, of which 3 include housing allocations. 13 parishes are designated as Neighbourhood Plan Areas (5 with drafted plans). 12 parishes are covered by Village Design Statements.

Both TVBC's Corporate Plan and its new Rural Offer, commit to supporting inclusive, forward-looking, community-driven approaches to place-based and localised service delivery. The Rural Offer and Action Plan sets out a renewed commitment to working in partnership with rural communities to shape development, wellbeing, and prosperity in ways that reflect their distinct identities, needs and aspirations.<sup>9</sup> It outlines four priority themes designed to support thriving, sustainable rural communities:

### **1 Support village and rural communities to identify and plan for their future priorities, building upon their strengths, connections and sense of pride in the place where they live.**

This theme focuses on helping communities create local action plans that reflect their needs and aspirations. It emphasises inclusive engagement through the development of strong community networks and access to opportunities through direct funding and infrastructure provision. TVBC aims to protect and enhance local assets and provide support through a dedicated team of community engagement officers, ensuring resident voices shape their environment and their future.

### **2 Support villages and rural communities to plan for their future development and housing needs, to ensure the long term sustainability of their communities.**

TVBC is responsible for producing the Local Plan to guide new development and address housing needs across the borough. Meeting these demands, particularly in rural areas, presents a significant challenge. The aim is not only to increase access to affordable housing, but to support villages in shaping development that reflects their unique identity. This involves expanding the Community Planning Toolkit and encouraging neighbourhood planning, underpinned by funding and strategic guidance. The approach reflects a shift from focusing solely on sustainable development to also sustaining community.

<sup>9</sup> <https://democracy.testvalley.gov.uk/documents/s34534/Rural%20Offer%20-%20Annex%201.pdf>; <https://democracy.testvalley.gov.uk/documents/s34535/Rural%20Offer%20-%20Annex%202.pdf>

### **3 Work with villages and rural communities to strengthen connectedness and community resilience, that enables people to live well, and to mitigate the impacts of rural isolation.**

Building on existing local efforts, this theme promotes preparedness for emergencies and enhances local support networks by improving access to services. Rural isolation is identified as one of the key issues for the wellbeing of Test Valley residents and spans different age groups, affecting them in different ways. This theme supports actions that foster wellbeing and connectedness within and across communities.

### **4 Support the rural economy, to deliver prosperity by supporting rural businesses, skills development and helping to unlock future investment.**

This theme highlights the importance of the rural economy, including existing and proposed assets, traditional land-based industries and small enterprises. The council commits to supporting local businesses through training, and strategic partnerships. It also includes plans to support village shops, visitor economies, and to understand the economic value of natural assets including the River Test. These themes offer a strategic framework to guide place-based planning and investment, and inclusive citizen engagement across the borough. They highlight the importance of involving rural communities not only in shaping the future, but also in building on the past and present. They thus make a direct link between objectives for change and understandings of place.

## **2.2 The Importance of Place Perception**

Understanding place requires investigation of place perception, also known as 'sense of place', yet translating this into policy is difficult without a strong conceptual framework and evidential base. The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) highlights the interconnections between natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built capitals.<sup>10</sup> This perspective complements research into place perception which highlights its complexity, multidimensionality and dynamic character.<sup>11</sup> Place perception emerges from people's relationship to place, which includes both the physical characteristics of a place and feelings associated with it.<sup>12</sup> Feelings can be positive (e.g. belonging, pride) or negative (alienation, shame). Place perception encompasses:

<sup>10</sup> Flora, C.B. (2018) *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*, 4th ed. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494697>.

<sup>11</sup> Erfani, G. (2022). Reconceptualising sense of place: Towards a conceptual framework for investigating individual-community-place interrelationships. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 37(3), 452-466.

<sup>12</sup> Hummon, D. M. (1992). Community attachment: Local sentiment and sense of place. In I. Altman and S. Low (eds) *Place attachment*. Boston, MA: Springer US. pp. 253-278.

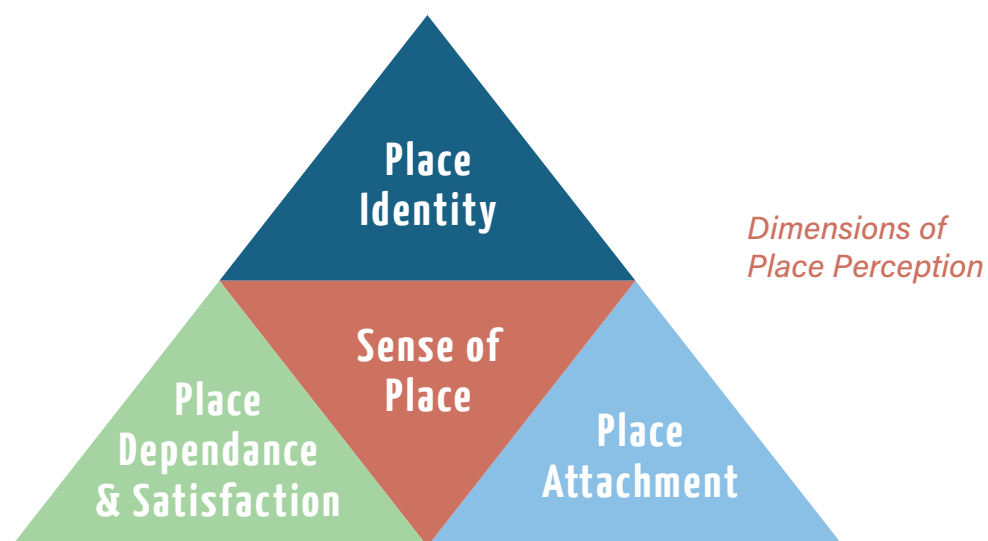


**Place identity:** The ways in which place contributes to an individual's sense of identity and self. People may define themselves in part by their connection to a particular place.<sup>13</sup>

**Place attachment:** The emotional connection between people and place including a sense of belonging and pride. It can motivate people to care for and protect a place, and is important to a sense of wellbeing.<sup>14</sup> Attachment ebbs and flows as the emotional bonds that people form with place are linked to their everyday experiences.<sup>15</sup> Strong place attachment supports pro-social behaviour and is thus important to sustainable communities.<sup>16</sup>

**Place Satisfaction:** The evaluation of a place based on an individual's experiences there. It is supportive of place attachment; the more positive an experience of place, the more likely someone is to feel attached to it.<sup>17</sup>

**Place Dependence:** A functional assessment of the degree to which an individual relies on a place to meet their needs, goals, and activities. It is linked to place satisfaction and is also supportive of place attachment; the more dependent someone is on a place, the more attached they may feel.<sup>18</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Bender, B.(2024) *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, 1st ed. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003575269>.

<sup>14</sup> Scannell, L. and Gifford, R. (2017) 'The Experienced Psychological Benefits of Place Attachment', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 51 (August 2017): 256–69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2017.04.001>.

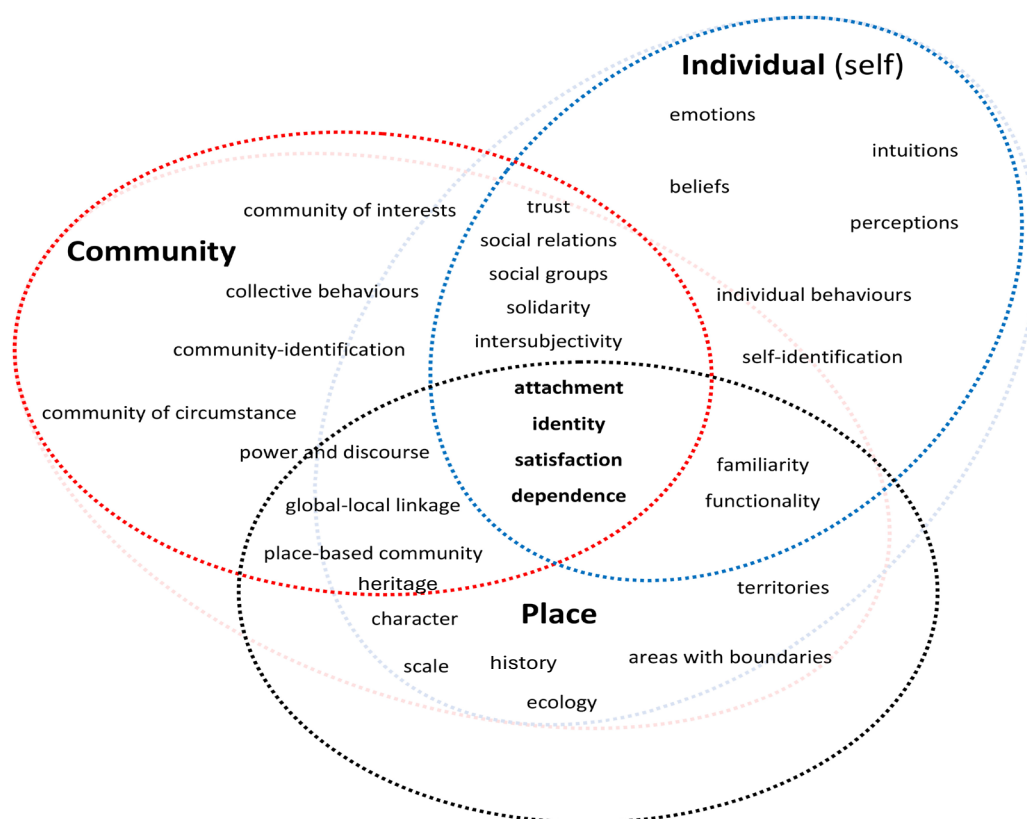
<sup>15</sup> Madgin, R. (2025). *Why Historic Places Matter Emotionally*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Vilarem, E. (2019). The Role of Attachment in Place-protective Behaviours. *Conscious Cities Anthology 2019: Science-Informed Architecture and Urbanism*. <https://theccd.org/article/the-role-of-attachment-in-place-protective-behaviours/#:~:text=Besides%20increasing%20the%20general%20well,feeling%20of%20attachment%20to%20places>.

<sup>17</sup> Scannell, L. and Gifford, R. (2017) 'The Experienced Psychological Benefits of Place Attachment', *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 51 (August 2017): 256–69,

<sup>18</sup> Cresswell, T. (2009) 'Place', in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00310-2>.

Place perception emerges from subjective experiences, emotional connections and meanings that individuals attach to a specific location which are, in turn, affected by socio-cultural, institutional, environmental and historical contexts <sup>19</sup> (Figure 1).



*Interrelationships between individual, community and place that lead to the components of place perception (Adapted after Erfani 2022). <sup>20</sup>*

Although both emotional and functional components are vital to place perception, data on identity and attachment are rarely used to inform local council decision-making. Instead, this tends to focus on place dependence (and, to a lesser extent, satisfaction). This may be because place dependence is perceived as more easily measurable via surveys, whereas insight gathering via qualitative methods appropriate to investigation of identity and emotion are less familiar.<sup>21</sup> In order to understand and investigate place perception, there is a need to develop a more expansive, relational approach that integrates lived experience of place and how this is expressed between self, other people, and the natural and built environment. This requires a different approach to data collection to that commonly used by local authorities.

<sup>19</sup> English Heritage (2001). *Power of Place. The Future of the Historic Environment*. London: English Heritage; Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (2001). *A force for our future*.

<sup>20</sup> Erfani, G. (2022). Reconceptualising sense of place: Towards a conceptual framework for investigating individual-community-place interrelationships. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 37(3), 452-466.

<sup>21</sup> Marsh, N., Owen, J. and Ashton, D. (2024). Lived experience and decision-making: an applied approach to using, connecting and representing qualitative evidence. <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/culture-and-devolution-series-think-pieces/lived>

## 2.3 Linking NxtGen to TVBC Priorities and Place Perception

The University of Southampton research and work of the NxtGen researchers were designed to provide data on place perception that align with TVBC priorities and the delivery of its Rural Offer.

### Theme 1:

**Support village and rural communities to identify and plan for their future priorities**

### NxtGen Focus:

Equipping residents to influence future changes by building capacity to investigate and understand the needs, aspirations and evidence-based priorities of their communities through participatory action research. This includes research on place identity and belonging to place, understanding and developing the potential of village assets, and relationship building between residents, parish councils and TVBC.

---

### Theme 2:

**Support villages and rural communities to plan for their future development and housing needs**

### NxtGen Focus:

Generating data on place attachment and the experience of place to reframe discussions around housing and planning. Parish Plans, Village Design Statements, and Neighbourhood Plans frequently cite local identity, landscape, social cohesion, and a sense of stewardship over space for which hyperlocal data are critical. The NxtGen research further explored community needs for continuity and change, so that future development is rooted in awareness of a community's sense of self.

---

### Theme 3:

**Work with villages and rural communities to strengthen connectedness and community resilience**

### NxtGen Focus:

Investigating emergency resilience through research on the impact of power cuts on residents, research on social connectedness and the role of village assets in reducing social isolation, and the role of tangible and intangible heritage in constructing place identity. NxtGen itself also functions as a community resilience intervention. By creating new pathways for participation, it creates a new social and research network within and across villages.

#### Theme 4:

**Support the rural economy, skills and investment**

#### NxtGen Focus:

**NxtGen training invests in human capital by developing transferable skills in research skills, data literacy, critical thinking, presentation and advocacy. It lays the foundation for more active civic leadership, especially amongst groups that often feel excluded from civic engagement. Research included the collection of data on community perceptions of village shops and other village assets, linked to the consideration of their potential for multi-use to support economic sustainability and social connectedness.**

## 2.4 Places in this Research

Barton Stacey is a historic rural parish in the Test Valley, Hampshire, set amid rolling chalk downland between Winchester and Andover. It comprises the main village and the hamlets of Bransbury, Newton Stacey, Drayton and Cocum. 40% of the land is owned by the Ministry of Defence. It covers an area of 2,031 hectares and is home to 1,049 residents. It has a low population density (0.52 people per hectare). Village amenities include a village shop and post office, primary school, village hall, pub, allotments and recreation ground. Property values are above the Hampshire average.

Barton Stacey has a Village Design Statement but does not have a Neighbourhood Plan. It has a housing allocation under TVBC's draft Local Plan.

Lockerley is a small rural parish in Test Valley of 624 hectares which is home to 825 residents. The village is more or less split between two of its historic greens, Lockerley Green and Butts Green, each with its own cluster of homes and community landmarks. It has a low population density (1.33 people per hectare) and an older-than-average demographic, with 22.7% aged 70 or over. The parish offers key amenities including a village shop, hall, primary school, playground and two churches. Property values are amongst the highest in the Borough. Lockerley currently has neither a Village Design Statement nor a Neighbourhood Plan. It has a housing allocation under TVBC's draft Local Plan.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1 NxtGen Community Researcher Training Programme

The NxtGen Community Researcher Training Programme is a 12 unit Participatory Action Research (PAR) training programme designed by the University of Southampton. It was delivered in collaboration with TVBC across 16 sessions.

PAR is a methodological approach that invites communities to co-design, conduct, and analyse research on issues they themselves define.<sup>22</sup> PAR has been used widely in development, education, and health contexts.<sup>23</sup> It has also been used extensively in developing methods of democratic and participatory decision-making with an emphasis on inquiry and investigation<sup>24</sup> but its integration into community development and planning processes using pedagogy of training remains relatively novel in the UK context.

NxtGen builds upon the University of Southampton's experience of developing and delivering the NxtGen Young Researcher Programme through the well-established LifeLab.<sup>25</sup> Designed as a comprehensive training initiative that empowers community members, NxtGen represents an innovative approach to research education.<sup>26</sup> It builds on evidence for developing capacity and building strong and accessible networks by training community researchers<sup>27</sup> but goes further by creating a structured pathway that connects skill development with active democratic engagement to create pathways for change.<sup>28</sup> It also nurtures collective agency through co-creation and mutual support.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> McIntyre, A. (2007). *Participatory action research*. Sage publications.

<sup>23</sup> Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of epidemiology and community health*, 60(10), 854.

<sup>24</sup> Chevalier, J. M. (2019). *Participatory action research: Theory and methods for engaged inquiry*. Routledge; Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U., Delgado, J., Rua, M., de-Graft Aikins, A., & Hodgetts, D. (2023). Participatory action research. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, 3(1), 34.

<sup>25</sup> <https://lifelabonline.org/course/index.php?categoryid=74>

<sup>26</sup> Black, C., Risley, K., Leonard, N., Awasthi, A., Chowdhury, A., Morris, D., Ganzuic, E., Breeze, E., Nowicki, G., Coomer, H., Hamed, H., Mazurek, L., Abbas, M., Hamid, M., Amissah, N., Courtnell, O., Ogunbande, O., Nagra, R., Nyimbili, W., Anderssen-Templeton, Z., Collins, H., Linaker, C., Parsons, H., Ramos Bonilla, G., Taheem, R., Barker, M., Ryan, M., Woods-Townsend, K., Sofaer, J. (2025). *Co-Creating Tomorrow - Our City, Our Say: Report and Recommendations of the Southampton Youth Voice Project*. University of Southampton

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.youngfoundation.org/community-research-networks/>.

<sup>28</sup> Young Researcher Training Programme Cohort (2024). *Shaping Tomorrow. A Youth-Led Call to Action*. University of Southampton. <https://lifelabonline.org/course/index.php?categoryid=74>

<sup>29</sup> Ansell, C., Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2023). Public administration and politics meet turbulence: The search for robust governance responses. *Public administration*, 101(1), 3-22.

Grounded in solid pedagogical theory, the programme combines evidence-based teaching methods with practical work to create an engaging learning experience that spans the complete research cycle and develops the skills necessary for conducting independent applied research. NxtGen community researchers ask and answer their own research questions, conduct rigorous research, and develop skills to advocate on issues they feel are a priority for them and for members of their communities. It thus connects informed pedagogy with citizen engagement, to embed capacity within local community contexts by creating new networks of citizen researchers.

This approach exemplifies and operationalises the principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) to strengthen democratic engagement and to build sustained future capacity.<sup>30</sup> Residents transform local knowledge into practical data and resources for planning and governance. It utilises existing community strengths where residents, their shared networks, connections and insights are themselves key assets, alongside the trust and goodwill that involvement by residents generates.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.nurtureddevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/>



# NxtGen COMMUNITY RESEARCHER TRAINING PROGRAMME

*The unique journey of the community researchers*

## RECRUITMENT

Residents from Barton Stacey and Lockerley were invited to apply to train as a Community Researcher with the University of Southampton (UoS). Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) Community Engagement staff promoted the opportunity in the villages. Selected applicants were invited to information sessions and interviews with staff from TVBC and UoS.

DEC  
'24

## TRAINING PROGRAMME

In late January the five successful applicants embarked upon the Community Researcher Training Programme (CRTP). This programme took place over 14 sessions covering: the role of a researcher, how to undertake research, collecting and processing data and sharing and evaluating research findings.

JAN  
'25

## DEVELOPMENT OF QUESTIONS IN TVBC CONTEXT

This interactive session helped the Community Researchers to contextualise their research interests and develop focussed research questions.

FEB  
'25

## DATA COLLECTION

The Community Researchers reached out to residents in their villages to take part in their research activity. They did this by visiting schools and youth organisations, the village coffee mornings and by conducting qualitative interviews in people's own homes. We also organised a community research day in each village. This gave the researchers additional opportunities to engage with their communities and allowed us to collect additional data to complement and enrich the Community Researchers' work.

APR  
'25

## ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

The Community Researchers analysed the data they had gathered, exploring what this told them and interpreting their findings. They reviewed the process and reflected upon the validity, reliability and implications of their work. Each researcher chose how to present their research project to convey the background, the research question, the method used, the results, the evaluation and conclusion and the references used.

MAY  
'25

## RESEARCH TO RECOMMENDATIONS WORKSHOP

This facilitated workshop enabled the Community Researchers to present their findings and discuss the implications with TVBC Councillors, TVBC staff and Parish Councillors from both villages. The event culminated with stakeholders coproducing recommendations that can be actioned in the near future.

JUNE  
'25

## THE FUTURE

The coproduced recommendations are actioned and the progress monitored.  
There is further dissemination of the NxtGen programme and outcomes for instance Lockerley and Barton Stacey fetes.

*The TVBC NxtGen Community Researcher Journey*

## 3.2 Community Researcher Recruitment

Recruitment was jointly co-ordinated by TVBC and the University of Southampton. Participants were recruited through local networks, with an emphasis on representing a diversity of voices across the rural communities involved. The initial aim was to recruit 12 participants from Barton Stacey and Lockerley (6 from each). Recruitment materials included tailored, co-branded posters using parish-specific imagery and language to emphasise local relevance. These were distributed via parish council notice boards, village shops, post offices, and officer networks, and complemented by in-person outreach at local events, including a Christmas fete.

Eligibility criteria were intentionally flexible: applicants could live in, work in, or have a meaningful connection to the parish. Recruitment began in December 2024, but due to limited uptake and seasonal constraints, the selection process was postponed to January 2025. Two evening selection events were held at a central location (King's Somborne Village Hall), where applicants participated in a short interview (co-facilitated by a university and a TVBC representative) and a group activity.

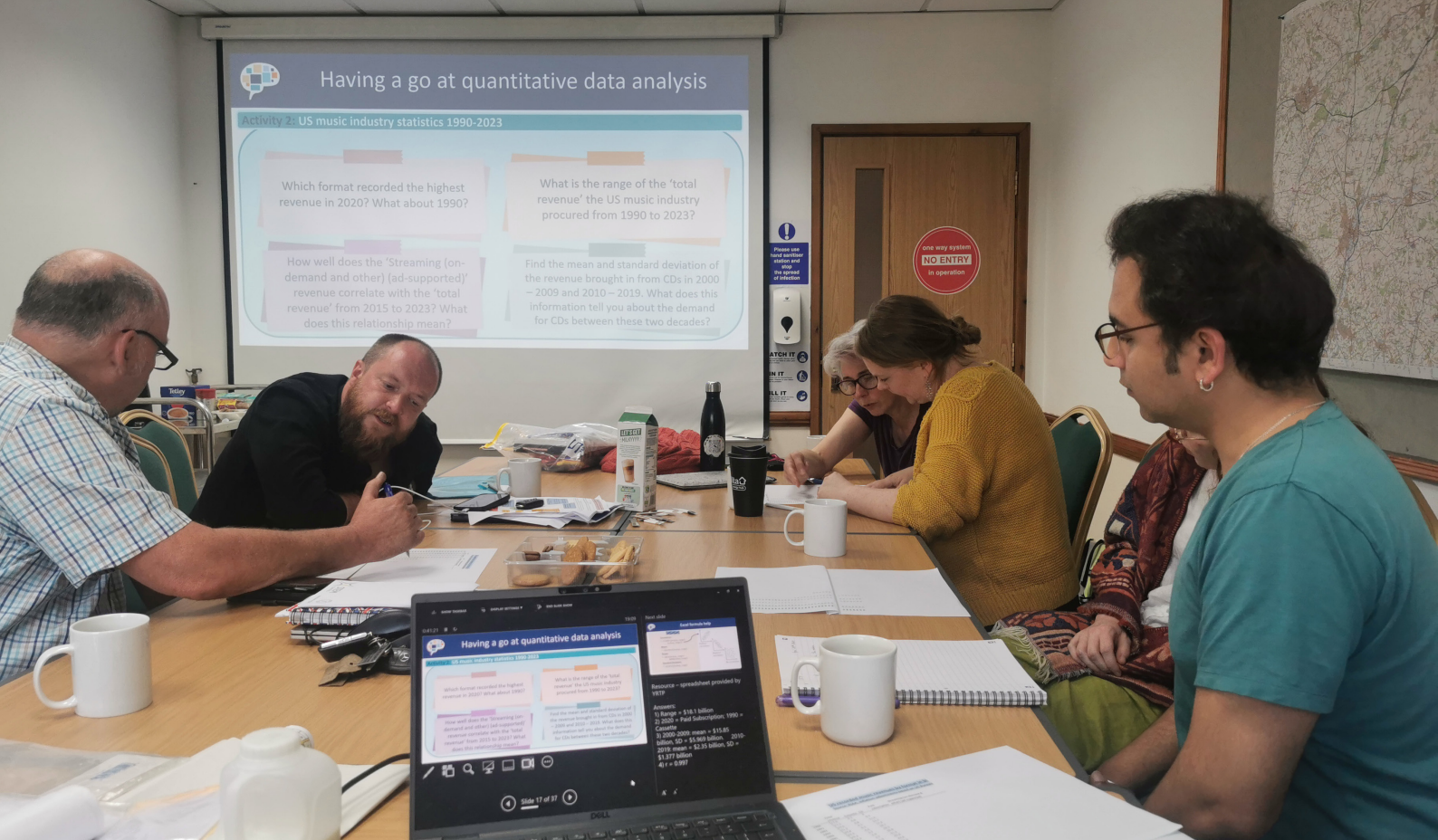
Five community researchers (1 from Barton Stacey, 4 from Lockerley) were selected based on availability, motivation, and alignment with the programme's aims. Following the unexpected death of one of the community researchers, a University of Southampton Policy Associate was employed to complete her research.

All community researchers were offered compensation for their time (training and independent work) up to 7.5 hours per week. In order to facilitate attendance, taxis were provided for participants who could not drive and lived in villages with poor public transport.



*Recruitment poster in Barton Stacey*





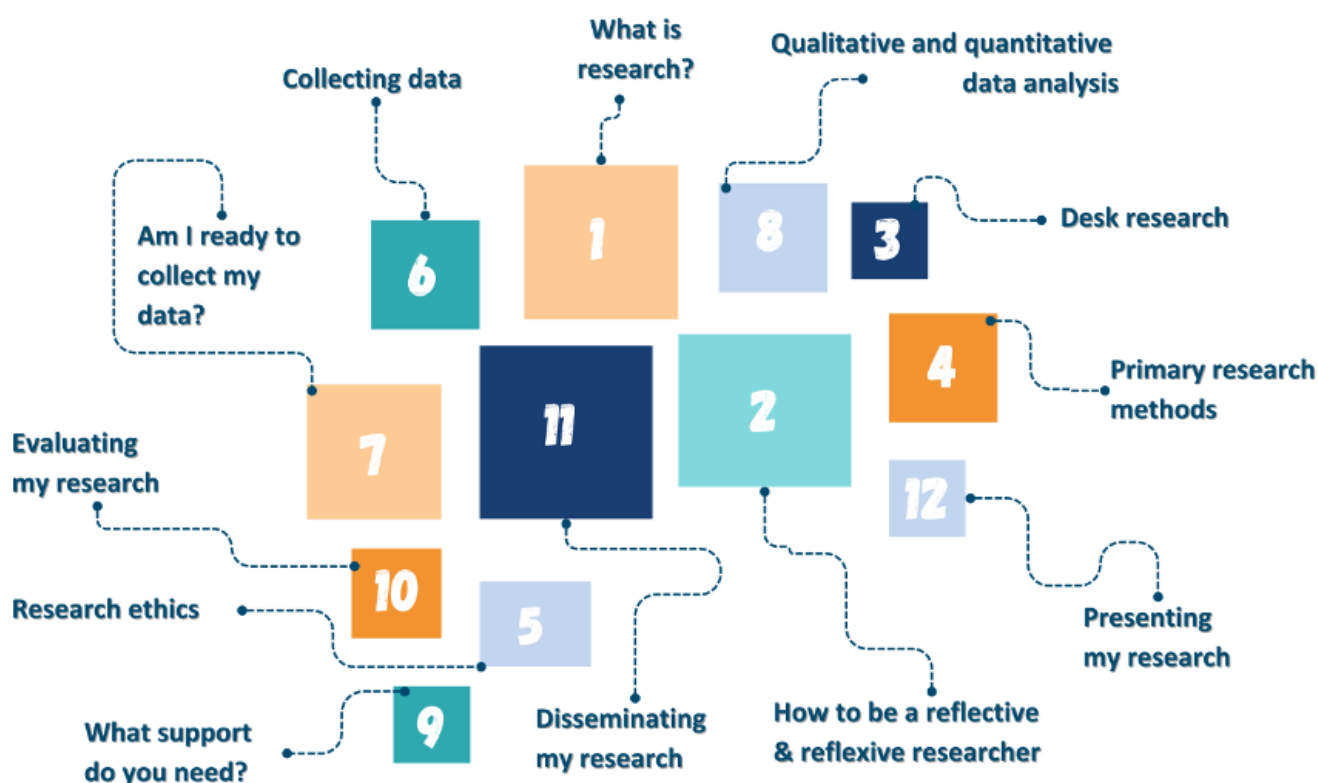
*NxtGen community researcher training session in Kings Somborne village hall*

## 3.3 Delivery of the NxtGen Training Programme

NxtGen was delivered between 4th February and 3rd June 2025 at King's Somborne village hall. The programme ran weekly (excluding school holidays) as evening sessions designed to accommodate participants' working lives.

The community researchers took part in structured research skills training covering:

- **Research design** (e.g. developing questions, ethics, reflexivity).
- **Safeguarding and Ethics.** All research carried out by the community researchers, and in relation to the project, was subject to University of Southampton Ethics review.
- **Data collection methods** (e.g. survey, interviews, mapping, photo elicitation and other creative methods).
- **Data analysis** (both qualitative and quantitative techniques including thematic coding).
- **Presentation and dissemination skills.**



*NxtGen Community Researcher Training Programme*

## 3.4 Development of Research Questions within a TVBC Context

Representatives of a variety of TVBC services presented their key challenges to the community researchers. Community researchers were able to ask questions and follow-up with TVBC officers. The community researchers were introduced to the information and data available on the TVBC website, and provided with Parish Profiles for Barton Stacey and Lockerley. This context helped them to identify and develop their research questions by identifying local needs and evidence gaps.

By framing the research around place perception and drawing on a range of questions facing TVBC, rather than a narrow focus on housing or planning, the CRTP created space for more holistic, deeper, emotionally resonant conversations. This approach allowed residents to articulate their values, hopes, and concerns in ways that felt authentic and grounded in lived experience. It also fostered more collaborative policy engagement, which surfaced individual and shared insights that traditional consultation might overlook, particularly around identity, belonging, and the social meaning of place. In doing so, the **programme bridged emotional connection and strategic planning, enabling communities to express what change feels like, not just what it looks like.**



## 3.5 Data Collection



*Collecting village timeline data in Barton Stacey*



*Collecting village Monopoly data in Barton Stacey*



*Community researcher Jenny Bannister collecting survey data at the Lockerley village community day*



*Community researcher Nina May collecting data using annotated drawings at the Barton Stacey village community day*

Data collection was carried out independently by the community researchers with additional data collected at two village community days.

## Independent Data Collection

Community researchers collected data independently in their villages using quantitative, qualitative and creative methods. The latter are particularly suitable for community research as they are accessible to a wide range of participants.<sup>31</sup> Methods included:

- Online and in-person surveys.
- One-to-one Interviews.
- Focus groups.
- Oral histories: Short oral histories documenting lived experiences.
- Sketch mapping: Participants drew their own maps of the village, indicating areas of connection, concern, or aspiration.
- Story completion: used to explore children's understandings of place.
- Annotated drawing: used to explore how villagers interact with public spaces.
- Annotated maps: participants annotated existing maps of the village.

These were often used in combination as part of a mixed methods approach.

## Village Community Days

Two Village Community Days were held, one in Barton Stacey and one in Lockerley. These events complemented the independent work of the community researchers and generated supplementary data to the small cohort of community researchers. They served to exercise skills in community research, to expand the reach of the project through broader resident participation, and to generate qualitative data related to place perception. Importantly, they also provided a vital opportunity for relationship-building between residents, community researchers, parish councillors, TVBC officers, and University of Southampton staff.

Recruitment for the events was jointly coordinated by TVBC and the University of Southampton. A flyer was hand-delivered to every household in both parishes alongside social media publicity, thereby ensuring wide reach. The flyers emphasised the informal, inclusive nature of the events and featured incentives, such as a raffle prize for a voucher to the local independent shop in Barton Stacey, to encourage attendance. TVBC community officers also shared information via parish councils, notice boards, and their networks. Notably, community awareness of NxtGen and the work of the community researchers had already been seeded through previous outreach and training activities, creating familiarity and trust that supported participation.

<sup>31</sup> <https://arc-kss.nihr.ac.uk/news/blog-creative-approaches-to-community-engagement-and-involvement>



The events were hosted in each parish's village hall and ran as drop-in, multi-station sessions using activities designed to be interactive, creative, and reflective. Community researchers actively facilitated many of the activities. The village community days offered them hands-on experience in fieldwork at scale, deepening their understanding of applied research methods and community engagement. Some used the events as part of their formal data collection.

The activities used accessible creative methods to gather insight into both personal and collective experiences of place. They included:

- **Village Monopoly:** Using the familiar format of a Monopoly board, participants were invited to label colour-coded property squares with real places, services, activities or traditions from their own village, placing them according to how valuable they feel they are, rather than how much they might cost. The activity was designed to explore place attachment, place identity, place satisfaction and place dependence, including how communities define value beyond economics. Participant discussions and rationale were captured and transcribed as a further data set to support interpretation of the Monopoly boards.
- **Village Timeline:** Participants identified and placed significant historical events in chronological order on a shared timeline of the village. They were given free choice of events and could go as far back in time as they wished. This exercise aimed to surface how the dynamics of place were understood over time.
- **Personal Timeline:** Individuals mapped their own journey in relation to the village using three points: arrival in the village, the present day, and 2050. They were asked to reflect on something they felt proud of since they started living in the village, aspects that they found challenging today, and their future aspirations for the village. This captured perceptions of change and continuity linked to emotional and cultural values attached to place.
- **Village Time Capsule:** Residents were asked: If you could put one thing in a time capsule to represent life in the village today, what would it be? This aimed to elicit understandings of place-based identity.

## 3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation



*Discussing data with Marie Stubbington, TVBC Community Engagement Officer*

The community researchers analysed their data, supported by staff from the University of Southampton. Reflective and reflexive exercises informed consideration of their results and the potential limitations of their research. The University of Southampton team analysed the data from the village community days.

The community researchers shared their results with each other and the NxtGen delivery team to explore the implications of their findings. This enabled each of the community researchers to develop a series of recommendations based on their research. These were presented in formats chosen by individual researchers, including scientific posters and powerpoint presentations. Results and recommendations arising from the village community days were also presented in poster form and shared with the community stakeholders.

**Based on the research recommendations, the community researchers jointly developed a long list of 45 practical actions for change (Appendix 1). Following a priority-setting exercise (group deliberation and voting) by the community researchers, these were reduced to five agreed priorities to be taken to stakeholders in a Research to Recommendations workshop.**

## 3.7 Research to Recommendations Workshop



*Research to recommendations workshop at Lockerley village hall*



The programme culminated in a Research to Recommendations workshop held at Lockerley village hall which brought together community researchers, TVBC officers, County, Borough and Parish councillors, and University of Southampton staff.

The workshop was designed as a deliberative engagement event to co-create ways of taking forward recommendations arising from the research. This model has previously been successful in moving from research to action in a range of policy contexts.<sup>32</sup> **It creates a supportive environment for positive change to overcome polarisation of attitudes and to assist policy implementation by understanding points of consensus around place.** Furthermore, **people who believe that their actions influence decision making are more likely to intend to remain civically engaged.**<sup>33</sup>

The day formally commenced with an ice breaker activity to allow attendees to form relationships before any collaboration began. **The community researchers presented their findings and participants collaboratively developed a set of five actionable recommendations grounded in lived experience, locally gathered evidence and knowledge exchange. These proposals reflected the shared priorities of residents from Barton Stacey and Lockerley, whilst addressing broader themes identified in the Rural Offer such as resilience, inclusive governance, and social infrastructure.** The day exemplified the value of participatory and relational governance, demonstrating how communities and institutions can work together to co-create locally meaningful, forward-looking solutions.

Following the workshop, the results of the research and deliberative engagement were shared with the communities in Barton Stacey and Lockerley at the village fetes. They were also shared via exhibitions in each of the villages.

Next steps and implementation of the recommendations arising from the research and the co-production workshop will be monitored as part of an evaluation of the programme (see Section 5).

<sup>32</sup> The Young Researcher Training Cohort (2024) *Shaping tomorrow: A youth-led call to action*. University of Southampton; Black, C. et al (2025) *Co-Creating Tomorrow. Our City, Our Say: Report and Recommendations of the Southampton Youth Voice Project*. University of Southampton.

<sup>33</sup> Anton, E. and Lawrence, C. (2016). The relationship between place attachment, the theory of planned behaviour and residents' response to place change. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 47(3): 145-154

# 4. Research Results and Recommendations

This section presents key findings and recommendations arising from the work of both community researchers and University of Southampton staff. Each of the 9 sub-projects reported on below explore issues identified as important by local residents. The results capture a rich picture of what matters to people in Barton Stacey and Lockerley.

## 4.1

### Understanding the difficulties created by power cuts for elderly residents in Lockerley. How are villagers affected by power cuts? How much resilience is there when these happen?

**Researcher:** Jenny Bannister

**Method:** Online and in-person survey (27 responses) and 1:1 interviews (4 in-depth interviews with participants selected for range of insights).

#### Findings:

- **96% of respondents had been affected by power cuts.**
- **The impact of power cuts on communication, in particular lack of access to a telephone in the event of a power cut, is a significant problem highlighted by all respondents.** Mobile coverage is poor. Residents are therefore reliant on internet calling / broadband for telephone communication. This does not work during a power cut, meaning that communication is cut within and outside the village:
  - Residents cannot contact people for assistance.
  - Residents cannot find out what is happening and are unaware of emergency measures put in place by the electricity provider or local authority. Several respondents mentioned a burger van which provided hot food during a power cut, but hardly anyone in the village was aware of it as communication sources had also gone down.
  - Residents cannot easily report power outages.

- Other concerns highlighted by residents resulting from power cuts include:
  - Locked gates and garage doors meaning that residents cannot easily leave their properties.
  - Failure of electric fences leading to escape of livestock.
- **Elderly residents have come to expect power cuts.** 96% of respondents have lived in the village for more than 10 years and have personal strategies to cope when this happens. For example, 69% of respondents have a means of cooking which does not require the use of electricity. Other strategies include battery operated torches, tinned food, blankets and wood burners. **These individuals therefore have good resilience, which is related to duration of residence in the village.**
- **Only 1 out of 7 respondents who consider themselves a disabled person was on the priority services register.** However, there did not appear to be a relationship between disability and the degree to which people considered themselves affected by a power cut. This is likely to reflect high levels of self-reliance and preparedness by elderly villagers, again linked to duration of residence in the village.
- Although not the original focus of this research, during the study it became clear that **residents who have recently moved to the village, including those with young children, are unused to power cuts. They may have low levels of emergency preparedness compared to elderly residents.**
- Respondents highlighted the **importance of a community support network.** While still good, this risks decline and is not perceived as hands-on as people remember it in the past.

**Strong individual resilience for the elderly does not translate to strong community resilience. Social infrastructure (relationships, connections, and support systems) aligns with broader resilience indicating that community resilience stems from not just physical assets, but human relations.<sup>34</sup> The impact of power cuts on communication and information flow for all, lack of preparedness by new residents, and risks to community support networks mean that community resilience is poor. Individual resilience is likely to be linked to duration of residence in the village; the longer duration of residence, the greater the resilience.**

<sup>34</sup> Pfefferbaum, B., Van Horn, R. L., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2017). A conceptual framework to enhance community resilience using social capital. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 45(2), 102-110.



### Recommendations:

- **Put measures in place to ensure communication during a power cut** including access to a landline.
- **Provide consistent and reliable information** from local village groups, council and electricity providers in event of a power cut. This could be facilitated through key persons who could disseminate information and a register of residents requiring support.
- **Locate a generator in the village hall so that a warm hub can be set up** to provide drinks and hot food, with facilities to charge devices. Communal provision is necessary to support those with less experience of adaptation to power cuts, particularly when they last more than a few hours.
- **Revive a hands-on community support network** to engage all generations across the community.
- **Increase uptake of priority services registration.**

“It would be great if there was a central place (in a power cut) that you could ring and they can say what was happening and give you advice.”

“A pregnant lady in the village couldn’t get to hospital because of bad weather, so Dad took her on his tractor.”

## 4.2

### Understanding the role of village stories in connecting residents of Lockerley to the village. What do villagers take pride in and what makes the village special to them?

**Researcher:** James Walsh

**Method:** Oral history (5 participants).

#### **Findings:**

- **Village stories create, and reflect, a sense of pride in place.**
- Lockerley is not just a place where people live. **Stories of place actively contribute to a sense of personal and village identity. They inspire belonging and attachment to place.** People were eager to share their stories of Lockerley because **they fear that this identity is being lost.**
- Village heritage – from its agricultural roots to its role in wartime resilience – continues to shape the geography of the village today. **Heritage thus echoes in the lives of its modern inhabitants and the ways that they experience the place where they live.**
- **Village stories were not always positive or nostalgic, but they were overwhelmingly linked to social or historical events that involved many people in the village.** They included narratives of migration, family and work life and intergenerational memory, revealing processes of place and attachment to place. Stories were particularly rich in reflecting the emotional texture of village life. They speak to the ways that generations have grown, the rhythms of rural life, people have celebrated community, and how people have weathered change together. They inspire resilience by recognizing the strength and adaptability of the village over time.
- **Preserving and celebrating village stories reinforces a shared heritage and fosters social connections across generations.** They ensure that future generations understand where they come from and feel connected to their community. When people see that their voices and experiences are valued, they say that they are more likely to engage with local life.

Stories of place matter because they are central to the formation of pride in place, place-based identity and place attachment. Strong identities and links to place are likely to increase people's care for place.<sup>35</sup> However, residents are concerned about loss of identity. Turnover in village residents means that people are less likely to have longstanding links to the village and thus less likely to be aware of these stories and the heritage of the village. Furthermore, changes in working patterns (increase in home working and fewer residents linked to the agricultural sector) mean that there are fewer opportunities to create new communal stories. Nonetheless, people are eager to hear these stories because they help them to understand their place differently and to connect to it.

#### Recommendation:

- **Create an accessible archive of village oral history in order to support village identity and social connectedness.**
- **Share village stories at the school and at village events.** Showcasing Lockerley's rich history is a mirror for the village to see and celebrate itself.
- **Create an illustrated Lockerley storybook for children** based on village oral history.
- **Develop a 'Lockerley plaque project'** based on the English Heritage Blue Plaque scheme to highlight connections between people and place in the village.
- **Create opportunities for the village to create new stories and shared memories through village events and creation of a social hub.**



*Blue plaque for nuclear weapons accident in Lockerley created by community researcher James Walsh*

<sup>35</sup> Göksenin, I. and Edward F. (2004), 'Place Attachment and Sense of Belonging', *Facilities* 22, no. 5/6: 120–28, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02632770410540333>.

## 4.3

### What do the children of Lockerley notice about their village?

**Researcher:** Philip May

**Method:** Story completion, map annotation and focus groups with 14 children age 7-13.

**Findings:**

- **Children value Lockerley. They are keen to protect it.** They value its green and blue spaces, and the facilities Lockerley has to offer including the shop and scout hut. The primary school was particularly highly valued by all participants as a safe, loving place to learn.
- The Tim Iles Playpark was also highly valued, though children were very keen to share their frustrations that, as they grow older, its value wains. **They long for facilities that they can use as older children.**
- Lockerley Motors elicited universally negative responses. **Children don't feel safe walking past the garage, or when cars are parked near the road junction.**
- **Children are aware that Lockerley is poorly served by public transport** and expressed frustration that they are unable to leave Lockerley to go to Romsey or further afield without either a long walk along a road with no footpath, or by getting lifts from parents.
- **All participants expressed enjoyment of events where the whole community comes together.**

**For Lockerley to continue to be a vibrant community, young people need to feel they are recognised and respected by the wider community. Children's positive feelings about the village and desire to care for it have potential to be converted into active stewardship. They also value opportunities for intergenerational relationships such as the village fete; intergenerational activities are known to support both children and adults' feelings of wellbeing specifically in deepening relational bonds.<sup>36</sup> However, the lack of facilities for older children means that young children already anticipate having to leave the village for social experiences. Furthermore, concerns about cars in the village and the lack of safe footpaths and public transport restrict young people's independence and autonomous mobility within a neighbourhood which are vital to the development of young people's sense of agency and wellbeing.<sup>37</sup> If unaddressed,**

<sup>36</sup> Campbell, F., Whear, R., Rogers, M., Sutton, A., Barlow, J., Booth, A., ... & Thompson Coon, J. (2024). What is the effect of intergenerational activities on the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people?: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 20(3), e1429.

<sup>37</sup> Weir, H. (2023). Children's autonomous mobility and their well-being. *Wellbeing, Space and Society*, 4, 100134.

lack of facilities alongside practical barriers to independence are likely to restrict the development of place attachment, with knock on effects for children's identity, security and sense of belonging.<sup>38</sup> They may also increase risk of young people's social isolation, with associated implications for poor mental health, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>39</sup>

### Recommendations:

- **Enhance recreational facilities for young people**, especially aimed at those that might use them independently. This need not be expensive. Football goals were mentioned on several occasions. These would be most popular if erected on Butts Green, but could also be erected at Lockerley Green.
- **Improve facilities at the Tim Iles Community Playpark**. The carpark should be enlarged and access made available from the playpark to the watercourse that flows adjacent to the park. Shelter should be provided in the park to protect from sun and rain.
- **Address the continued real and perceived dangers presented by the parking around Lockerley Motors**. Children were most concerned about anti-social parking on footpaths near the garage, especially at the road junction.
- **Address road traffic speeds** through the village and especially near the junction of Lockerley Road and Butts Green.
- **Create better pedestrian access so that children can move safely and independently through the village**. This should include improved access to the Tim Isles Community Playpark on foot from Lockerley Green. Footpath road markings have been employed in Awbridge to address similar needs. If parents felt able to park elsewhere and walk safely to the park with their children, this would also help to address problems with the size of the carpark at the playpark. Create a safe footpath from the village to the station (currently very wet in winter). Create a safe footpath linking Lockerley Green and Butts Green.
- **Promote community events**, such as the village fete, firework displays, quiz and games evenings, that involve all ages. These were highly valued by young people.
- **Develop intergenerational approaches to local environmental stewardship**, for example a 'tree guardian' scheme like that which has been successful in Mansbridge, Southampton, where primary school children and their parents adopt a newly planted tree in order to promote young people's involvement in their community.

<sup>38</sup> Jack, G. (2010). Place Matters: The Significance of Place Attachments for Children's Well-Being, *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 40, Issue 3, April 2010, Pages 755–771, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcn142>

<sup>39</sup> Loades, M. E., Chatburn, E., Higson-Sweeney, N., Reynolds, S., Shafran, R., Brigden, A., ... & Crawley, E. (2020). Rapid systematic review: the impact of social isolation and loneliness on the mental health of children and adolescents in the context of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 59(11), 1218–1239.

## 4.4

### Exploring social connectedness in Barton Stacey: The impact of clubs and social spaces on the wellbeing of rural community inhabitants.

**Researcher:** Nina May

**Method:** Mixed methods including qualitative and quantitative survey, and annotated drawings used to explore how villagers interact with public spaces (32 participants).

#### **Findings:**

- Social connectedness is defined as, “The extent to which one has meaningful, close, and constructive relationships with others”.<sup>40</sup> It is vital to health and wellbeing while its converse, social isolation and loneliness, are leading causes of mental health difficulties.<sup>41</sup>
- **Approximately two thirds (68.6%) of respondents reported a self-described positive social connectedness score. Almost one third (31.4%) reported a neutral or negative self-described social connectedness score.**
- **Individuals with higher social connectedness scores had a greater awareness of local opportunities for social interaction. They were more likely to actively participate in in-person local events and use local amenities.**
- **Opportunities to develop social networks have reduced since the COVID-19 pandemic; almost half the established clubs and groups in the village have ceased since then.** Data suggest that there is greater uptake of the few events that continue to run, indicating a strong desire to participate in what is still available.

**“No longer having any connections through school or groups, used to be a very sociable village with Drama Group, football club, etc.”**

<sup>40</sup> O'Rourke H.M. and Sidani, S.(2017). Definition, Determinants, and Outcomes of Social Connectedness for Older Adults: A Scoping Review. J Gerontol Nurs. 2017 Jul 1;43(7):43-52. doi: 10.3928/00989134-20170223-03. Epub 2017 Apr 11. PMID: 28399313.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid



- Social connectedness takes place in social spaces. When asked to rank a list of village amenities in order of importance, the top three amenities were:

1. Village shop, where there are some chairs and tables outside but no specific social meetups.
2. The pub which has a regular quiz, open mic night, and other events.
3. The playpark.

All of these spaces are informal. They do not necessitate an organised event or club to be used and can be incorporated into villagers' own routines to provide an organically developing social circle. Interestingly, the village hall was not amongst the most important assets in the village. This is surprising considering half of respondents were in the village hall whilst filling out the survey.

- Positive feelings about place are important to wellbeing.<sup>42</sup> When given free choice to draw themselves anywhere within the village, participants chose a wide range of locations including the allotments, MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area) and outdoor gym. This suggests that **there is a difference between the perceived utilitarian importance of village spaces reported in a survey and the emotional value of spaces where people feel safe and comfortable. People were keen to highlight how important it is to protect these spaces.**



*Annotated drawing showing where participants located themselves in public spaces in the village*

<sup>42</sup> Wickramaratne, P. J., Yangchen, T., Lepow, L., Patra, B. G., Glicksburg, B., Talati, A., ... & Weissman, M. M. (2022). Social connectedness as a determinant of mental health: A scoping review. *PloS one*, 17(10), e0275004.



*Annotated drawings showing where participants located themselves in public spaces in the village*

Strong social connectedness is vital for health and wellbeing.<sup>43</sup> In Barton Stacey, one third of residents report neutral or poor social connectedness. This has serious implications for a future burden on health and social care services. In Barton Stacey, respondents highlighted the need for better communication of village events, the unrealized potential of village assets to support social connectedness, as well as nurturing and protecting places that elicit positive feelings in order to support wellbeing.

<sup>43</sup> DCMS (2022) *Mental Health and Loneliness: The Relationship Across Life Stages* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-loneliness-the-relationship-across-life-stages/mental-health-and-loneliness-the-relationship-across-life-stages>; World Health Organisation (2025). *From Loneliness to Social Connection: Charting a Path to Healthier Societies. Report of the WHO Commission on Social Connection*. <https://www.who.int/groups/commission-on-social-connection>

### Recommendations:

- **Recognise gaps in information flow and develop a better, more inclusive communication strategy.**
- **Develop the potential of village assets to support social connectedness.** This could include creation of a sustainable community hub to support social connectedness and meet the desire for a place where the whole community can come together in an inclusive way.
- **Protect spaces in the village that contribute to residents' wellbeing,** such as the allotments.
- **Take a multilayered approach to data collection and to understanding community needs that includes qualitative as well as quantitative data, and that prioritises wellbeing.**

## 4.5

### What matters in the village of Lockerley? How do residents perceive the place where they live?

**Researcher:** Isabel Sargent

**Method:** Drawing and annotation of maps exploring how different parts of the village are experienced and perceived through the seasons (7 participants).

### Findings:

- **Five key themes emerged from the data:**
  1. **Where things are:** the physical layout of the village and its surroundings.
  2. **Being a community:** activities and events such as attending the coffee shop, the church, taking part in the bluebell walk and the fun run.
  3. **Immerse the senses:** the sights, sounds, smells and feel of their village including village views, bird song and coolness, such as around the greens and the river. Villagers did not take these for granted.

- 4. Local amenities:** the school, the shop, the Memorial Hall, and being able to visit the river in hot weather.
- 5. Getting around:** the roads and footpaths, including opportunities and barriers to enjoying local amenities and immersing the senses.
- **There are four main influences on residents' ability to experience or access what is important to them:**
  - 1. Concern about who will be the next generation to take on organising roles for valued community activities and events.** Current models for organising village activities and events are often traditional and time-intensive. Consequently, they are often run by a small number of residents, particularly those who are retired and have spare time.
  - 2. Awareness that people need to 'use it or lose it' when considering amenities that matter, such as the shop and the Memorial Hall.** This sentiment was reflected in nostalgia for the pub which closed some time ago. Residents recognise that commercial amenities are only viable if the whole community use them.
  - 3. The important influence of the wider world beyond the village,** both on a daily basis and through turnover of residents in the village. Residents express a responsibility and a desire to actively engage with Lockerley's community activities and amenities for the benefit of current and future generations. However, in contrast to generations of the past, connections with the world beyond the boundaries of their village influence residents' capacity to engage with village life. Older residents want to stay in the village but feel that they will need to leave once they stop driving as public transport is poor and there is a lack of appropriate properties to downsize to.
  - 4. Access to important aspects of village life is limited by the present state of roads and footpaths which are often flooded.** In addition, parked cars or poor road surfaces inhibit safe access to village amenities. This causes considerable frustration and safety concerns.

**These findings highlight the importance of the tension in village life that puts the desire for being a community and local amenities in conflict with the desire for getting around; access to the wider world means that communities and amenities outside of Lockerley are sometimes used in place of those in the village. They also reveal a desire to diversify models of civic engagement.**



*Composite map of Lockerley based on themes extracted from individual maps.*

## Recommendations:

- **Implement innovative models for engagement with village activities such as 'do-mocracy' in order to involve a wider range of people in village life.** Do-mocracy is a form of grassroots and direct action based 'doing' to improve one's community. It promotes democratic engagement through hands-on involvement in shaping aspects of place, such as infrastructure, assets, and local services and institutions.<sup>44</sup> People are keen to make practical contributions but want alternative models of engagement than those available through the Parish Council; they don't want more paperwork or admin in their spare time.
- **Use existing village assets for multiple purposes.** This could include developing the village hall as a social hub with a co-working space and regular farmers' market to support financial viability. The village hall already hosts a popular coffee morning but this is not accessible to people who work during the day.
- **Improve pedestrian access to village amenities, including green and blue spaces.** In the first instance, this should focus on pedestrian access linking Lockerley Green and Butts Green, as well as the village to Dunbridge station where pedestrians are forced onto busy roads, and paths and roads are often flooded.

<sup>44</sup> Heijnen, A. (2020). Informal governance as enabler of creative collaborations: Institute for X in Aarhus. In M. Komorowski, and I. Picone (Eds.), *Creative Cluster Development: Governance, Place-Making and Entrepreneurship*. Routledge.



## 4.6

### How do residents of Barton Stacey and Lockerley understand, define and express the value of the place where they live?

**Researcher:** Kristina Risley (Community Activity Days in Barton Stacey and Lockerley)

**Method:** Village Monopoly

#### **Findings:**

Village Monopoly boards captured what matters to residents and how they make meaning from place.

- **What matters:** Analysis revealed 8 themes of what matters to villagers: infrastructure, natural surroundings, events and culture, age specific spaces, sentiment and memory, social action activities, faith-based activities and commercial activities. Although there were some similarities between the villages in the attribution of value to each of these, there were also context-specific differences.
  - **Natural surroundings** and natural heritage were given high value in both villages. Not only were they important for restorative walks and aesthetic scenery, but green spaces were also understood as social spaces and are important anchors for identity.
  - **Social action** was accorded mid-high value in both villages. It was a source of pride. However, whereas the Parish Council was considered “the glue of the village” in Barton Stacey, there were concerns about the effectiveness of the Parish Council in Lockerley where residents felt a sense of disconnection.
  - **Infrastructure** was given mid-low value in both villages. This reflected frustration about poor roads, footpaths, WiFi, mobile phone signal and drainage.
  - In both villages, **sentiments and memories** were attached to symbolic spaces on the Monopoly board, such as Chance, Free Parking, Go to Jail.
  - **Events and culture** including intangible heritage (village traditions and events) were valued in both villages but more so in Lockerley where they held substantial community and emotional capital.
  - **Age specific spaces** were highly valued in Barton Stacey and held mixed value in Lockerley. This may reflect a relative lack of public facilities for older children (see above).



- **Faith-based activities** were highly valued in Barton Stacey and attributed low value in Lockerley. Barton Stacey has an active church warden who lives in the village and is working together with the community to broaden the use of the church.
- **Commercial activities** were highly valued in Barton Stacey and attributed low-mid value in Lockerley. This reflects the importance of the shop and pub in Barton Stacey which have sentimental attachment for residents. Lockerley has a village shop which is of importance to residents, but it no longer has a pub. Residents also commented on issues with car parking at Lockerley Garage.
- **How people make meaning: Value was constructed through utility, emotion (feelings of pride in place, pleasure, calm, nostalgia, hope, frustration, disappointment, disconnection, loss), aesthetics, relationships between people, community and individual capital, and commercial imperatives.**
  - Of particular interest is the way in which the relative meanings of places were constructed through comparisons, interactions and communication (relational dynamics). Specifically, **participants had an acute awareness of the relationship between spatial and social divisions in a village in terms of who occupies particular spaces, and tensions around class and power dynamics.** This was particularly striking with regard to the perceived difference between 'old' and 'new' Barton Stacey. The latter was described as, "where we get our cleaners from", while some people living there suggested that they were looked down on by people from 'old' Barton Stacey.

**These insights into place value help to understand points of consensus as well as expose tensions in the ways that residents may construct value.**

**Residents understand a need for housing development but bolt-on development in a relatively small geographical area risks social fragmentation. Seen in conjunction with our findings about the importance of village heritage to sense of identity and place attachment, further social risks arise where newcomers may not share place-based values. Development of social capital (connections and networks) is critical to social cohesion.<sup>45</sup> Building new homes should therefore be allied to asset based community development that goes beyond constructing facilities. It should pay attention to people and to their needs for physical and social connectedness, and to heritage as a thread that binds past, present and future in order to create thriving communities.**

**Navigating the future requires sensitivity to the multi-dimensionality, complexity and contextual specificity of place value and its social implications.**

<sup>45</sup> Forrest, R., and Kearns, A. (2001). Social Cohesion, Social Capital and the Neighbourhood. *Urban Studies*, 38(12), 2125-2143.

## Recommendations:

- Decision-making should be informed not just by use value but by the full range of ways in which people value their places and how they link to lived experience.
- Communities should be empowered to conduct qualitative research that equips them, and local decision-makers, to better understand their places in order to make better decisions.
- Invest in heritage-led solutions for the 21st century to help to strengthen place attachment and foster the social connectedness that communities desire.
- Prioritise infill rather than estate development in villages in order to promote social cohesion and avoid spatial and social divisions.
- Support the Parish Council in Lockerley to be more visible and effective.
- Address village infrastructure.



Summary of village Monopoly data

## 4.7

### How do residents perceive temporal change in their village?

**Researcher:** Anwesha Trivedi (Community Activity Days in Barton Stacey and Lockerley)

**Method:** Village History: contribute towards a timeline of village history (total 42 participants).

**Findings:**

- **Despite living in villages with considerable history, residents in Barton Stacey and Lockerley did not tend to articulate time depth in their narration of the place where they live.** Instead, the history of the village was told through the lens of a personal experience of place (e.g. when people moved to the village, experiences they value, changes to village social and physical fabric). This was particularly surprising in Barton Stacey as the village has an active history and archaeology society who have carried out excavations in the village. Only 2 out of 33 respondents in Barton Stacey mentioned history outside their own period of residence in the village. This was in terms of links to the military in WW2 and the great fire of Barton Stacey in 1792. Only 1 out of 9 respondents in Lockerley acknowledged a deeper history of the village. This was a comment on the historic origin of the place name Butts Green in relation to practicing archery.
- **At Barton Stacey, the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic featured prominently in the timeline, as did current and previous events in village life that brought people together.** This included the completion of repairs to the village shop, the church fete and Christmas fair as well as the first use of social media (Barton Stacey Peeps), as well as the now defunct fireworks display and village ball. Narration of development of the village fabric included the installation of the playground and conversion of buildings at Wades Farm (now Ringbourne Copse) for mixed housing in 2015, which was regarded as a positive development.
- **In Lockerley residents highlighted village events they had experienced such as celebration of the Queen's jubilee or Glen Miller's WW2 visit to the troops at Lockerley Hall.** Significant changes to the village fabric included closure of the pub and opening of the youth club building.

**The self-referential nature of the construction of village history suggests that while villagers are acutely aware of changes to their surroundings, many residents may have little awareness of the historical development of their village. Many respondents told us that they had moved to the village relatively recently (within the last 5 years). Although they understood that the village had a history, they did not know any details about it beyond their own experiences. People may move to a village because it is a nice place**

without appreciating the historical dynamics that led to how it is today. They may desire village life without fully appreciating how it is constituted. The timeline data suggest that there is a real threat to village heritage as turnover in village residents may be eroding social and historical memory.

This threat to village heritage should be understood in conjunction with the profound concern over loss of village identity noted in other aspects of this research (see above). Together they have important implications for community development. In particular, because heritage is vital to a shared sense of place and the idea of a community, building additional housing without consideration of the relationship between heritage and village identity risks reducing residents' place attachment.

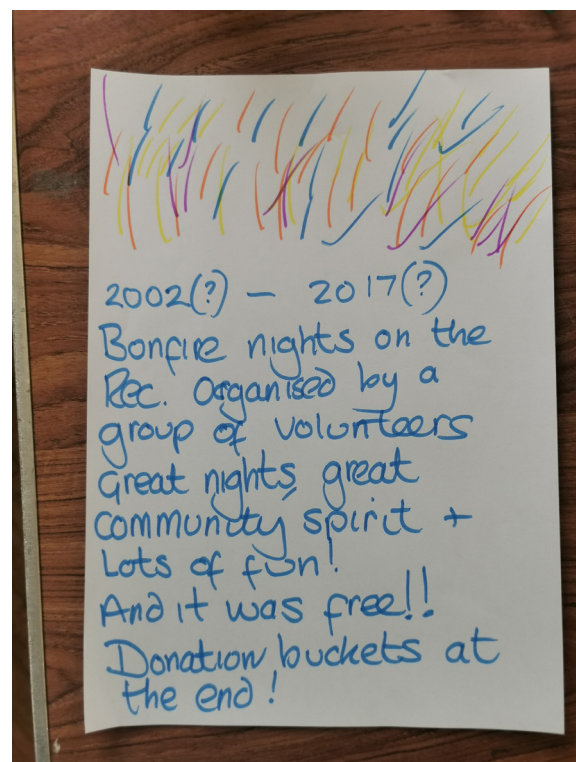
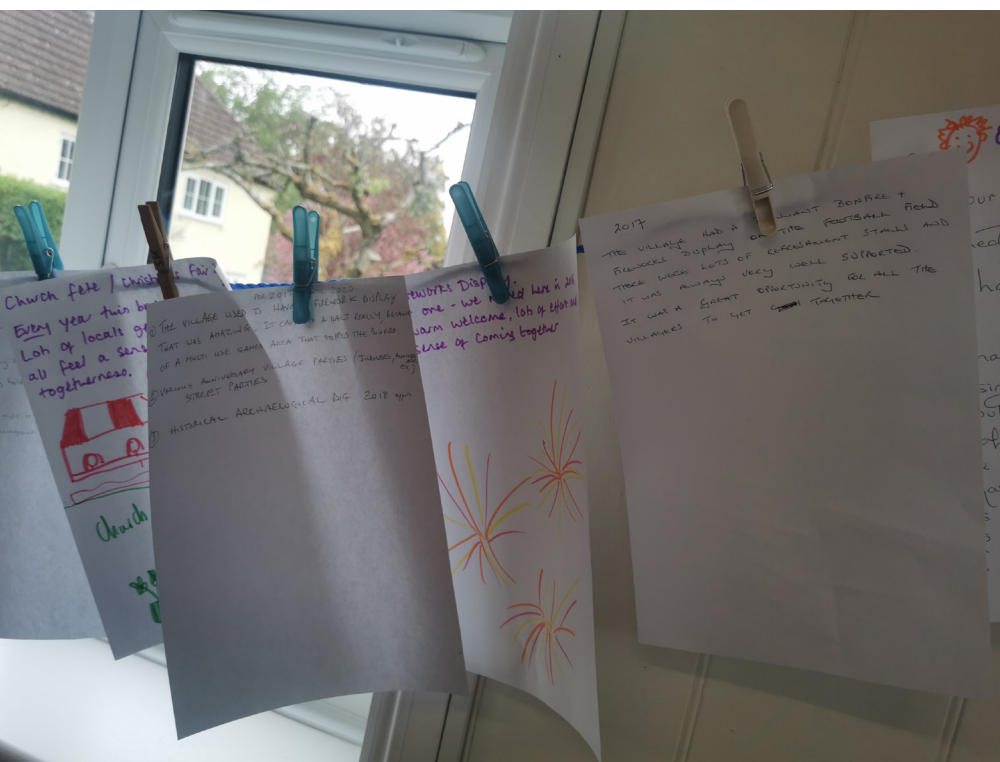
### Recommendations:

- **Community development should include heritage-led interventions to build a shared sense of community and strong place attachment.** This could include supporting intangible heritage such as village events or traditions that bring people together and that form part of the rhythm of a community, as well as supporting existing community assets to play a role in people's everyday lives. Failure to develop place attachment risks social fragmentation and anti-social behaviour.<sup>46</sup>
- Research shows that the length of time living in a place is linked to feelings of entitlement to decide about it and can determine degree of openness or hostility towards any real or perceived change, especially when that change involves new development.<sup>47</sup> We hypothesise that while people who have lived in a place for a long time may have strong place attachment and feel more entitled to make decisions, they may have different attitudes to change because they understand historical dynamics and have already seen changes. In contrast, newcomers have moved to a place because of what it is now. **Further research is needed to understand these dynamics in order to support villagers and policy-makers to make consensual decisions going forward.**

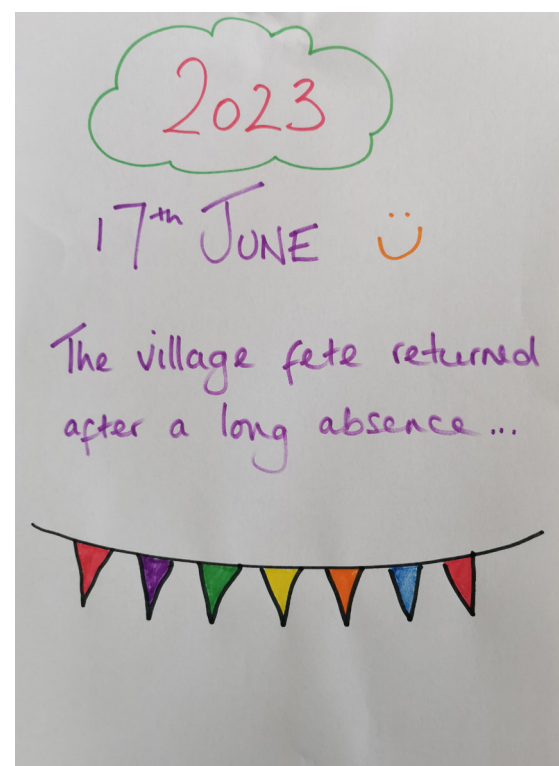
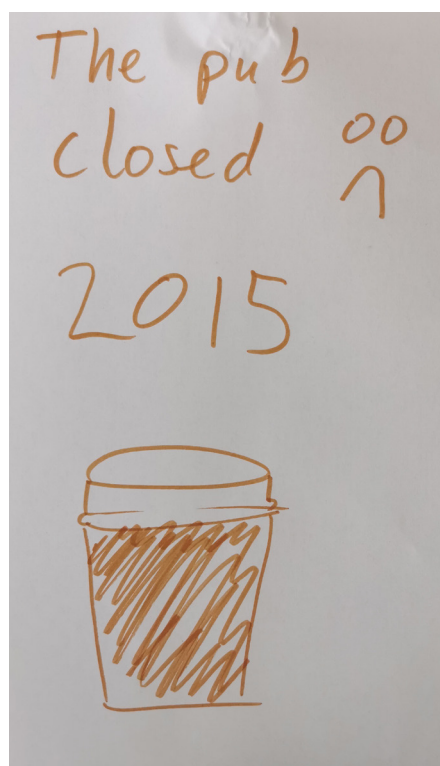
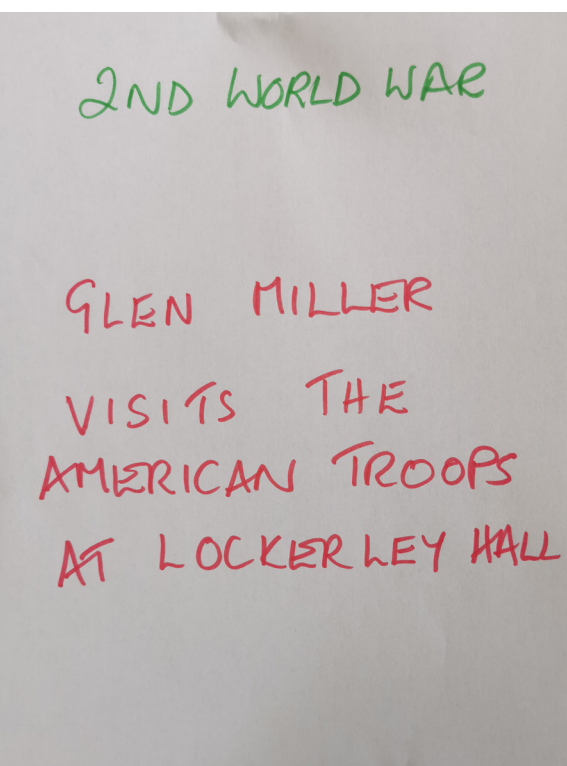
<sup>46</sup> Livingston, M., Bailey, N. & Kearns, A. (2010) Neighbourhood attachment in deprived areas: evidence from the north of England. *J Housing and the Built Environment* 25, 409–427. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-010-9196-3>

<sup>47</sup> Toruńczyk-Ruiz, S., and Martinović, B. (2020). The bright and dark sides of length of residence in the neighbourhood: Consequences for local participation and openness to newcomers. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 67, 101383.





Examples of timeline drawings from the village community day in Barton Stacey



Examples of timeline drawings from the village community day in Lockerley

## 4.8

### What makes people proud of the place where they live? What emotional and cultural values do residents attach to their places?

**Researcher:** Kristina Risley, Mansoor Nellikkal (Community Activity Days in Barton Stacey and Lockerley).

**Method:** Personal Timeline drawing (27 participants).

#### Findings:

- **Participants often linked their hopes for the future with things they felt were at risk or already lost.** Rather than abstract visions, people imagined futures grounded in connection, care and local continuity.
- **People value and are proud of:**

#### Nature

- Green spaces: village greens, river access, woodland, open views.
- Natural environment seen as safe, calming and central to village identity.
- Walks, open space used during lockdown, community gardening.

#### Built Assets

- Shop, post office (where still open), pub, church, school, village hall.
- Sports facilities and local amenities that build routine and access, some of which have been lost.

#### Community

- Events like fun runs, fetes, pub quiz, bell ringing.
- Shared traditions (cream teas, NYE disco, Christmas events, history group).
- Care and inclusion, such as charity activities.

- **People have future aspirations for, and identify risks to:**

- Nature**

- Concerns over losing green spaces to development.
    - Poor access to or maintenance of natural areas.
    - Better footpaths and walkable links between areas.
    - Environmental care and preservation during housing growth.

- Built Assets and Transport**

- Closure of key services (pub, post office, sports pavilion).
    - Insufficient internet and phone connectivity.
    - More amenities for all ages such as local café / tearoom, GP clinics for older residents.
    - Affordable housing, youth club, modernised social spaces.
    - Poor roads and poor public transport.

- Community**

- Loss of regular gathering points (pub, pavilion).
    - More events and clubs (writers' group, youth hub, coffee mornings).
    - Spaces that bring generations together.
    - A future that feels rooted in connection, care and shared memory.

**There is strong overlap between areas of pride, aspiration and risk. Although residents are proud of the place where they live, they do not feel secure about its future. They often see the future in terms of threat rather than opportunity. To support pride in place, residents' need to feel agency and control over their places, including active community engagement in decision-making. The overlaps between residents' current perceptions of pride and risk indicate that local agency may need bolstering if residents are not to become dislocated from local decision-making.**

Residents are not against building new homes. Indeed, this is part of their aspiration for the future. However, they want appropriate houses that serve community needs (affordable housing for people with connections to the village, including for families and people who wish to downsize), in places that protect what they value, take account of the specificity of village geography (e.g. link different parts of the village through better infrastructure), and that takes account of the need for improved services and facilities.

### Recommendations:

- **In order to support local decision-making, it is important to recognize the emotional and cultural value of places.** Human-centred tools for data collection need to be employed in order to extract the values that people attach to place. This cannot be done by survey alone.
- **Bolster local community agency by assisting local communities to identify their needs for continuity** (what they value and wish to preserve or enhance), **as well as their needs for development** within the context of village design statements, neighborhood plans and local plans.
- **Identify housing targets for villages and give them the opportunity to say where they would like to build, rather than top-down decision-making.**



## 4.9

### What represents village identity in Barton Stacey and Lockerley?

**Researcher:** Heather Parsons, Chairun Nisya, Philip May (Community Activity Days in Barton Stacey and Lockerley).

**Method:** Village time capsule (31 participants).

#### Findings:

- Responses included physical items (photos, documents) as well as relationships, people, and community events, revealing both the **tangible and intangible aspects of village identity**.
- In both villages, people nominated similar categories of objects. These represented:
  - **Nature:** Specific places in the village valued by residents for the view or for engagement with nature across the seasons. These included the river, village greens scenery, walks, wildlife, and daffodils around the church.
  - **Community Assets:** The school, the church, church bells, the pub, public transport and “An up-to-date village plan including all housing areas”. The latter suggests identification of a village first and foremost as a place where people live.
  - **Community spirit:** Residents focused on social relationships created through traditional events, village groups and activities, and in Barton Stacey the role of the Parish Council.
  - **Images of people and places:** Photographs of people who live in the village and of the village itself as social memories.

Residents wanted to ‘capture’ their villages at this moment in time (2025) in order to describe life now and contribute to the heritage of future generations. People, social memory and social relationships were identified as being at the heart of village identity. People were proud of their community. Both nature and community assets were perceived as valuable in their own right but also as underpinning the maintenance of community spirit.

#### Recommendations:

- **Recognise social relations and social memories as important sources of pride and local heritage that support village identity.**
- **Support natural and community assets as focal points for village identity in future village planning.**

# 5. Recommendations and Outcomes of Deliberative Engagement

Each of the five priority recommendations that the community researchers chose to take to the Research to Recommendations Workshop was discussed and doable next steps agreed. This resulted in the following co-produced recommendations and outcomes, which also support delivery of TVBC's Rural Offer.

## 5.1

### Recommendation:

#### Create and maintain a central village information register to support vulnerable residents in an emergency

The group recognised the need for village-level resilience planning, particularly given frequent power outages, communication blackouts, and flood risk in rural Test Valley. A central information register would identify vulnerable individuals and key local contacts, supported by a clear step-by-step action plan. Suggestions included community-led registers, physical and digital versions of the plan, defibrillator and CPR training, and coordination with national and local agencies. This system would support faster emergency response, help spontaneous volunteers mobilise, and ensure communication so that no resident is left behind in times of crisis.

**Supports delivery of TVBC Rural Offer** Theme 1: *Identifying and Planning for Future Priorities* and Theme 3 *Community Resilience and Wellbeing*. **Invests in human resilience and resilience infrastructure.**

**Next steps:** TVBC Resilience Forum and Parish Councils will take this forward by co-designing a secure central information register that enables coordination with emergency services, local health providers, and volunteer networks to integrate the register into existing resilience plans. This could include guidance, templates, and training so communities can maintain and regularly update the register.

## 5.2

### Recommendation:

#### Facilitate sports provision in Lockerley and access to it

This recommendation responds directly to feedback from young residents (age 7-14) who expressed a desire for spaces to play and socialise. Participants proposed identifying suitable fields or public spaces for sport and installing portable or wheeled goalposts as a cost-effective solution. Implementation should explore permissions, assess available land, and ensure sustainability of facilities through maintenance planning. Addressing this need can alleviate rural isolation, enhance youth wellbeing, and foster community spirit through shared activity. This model may be replicable in other villages across the Test Valley.

**Supports delivery of TVBC Rural Offer** Theme 1: *Identifying and Planning for Future Priorities* and Theme 3 *Community Resilience and Wellbeing*. **Enhance young people's wellbeing, independence and social connectedness.**

**Next Steps:** TVBC and Parish councils to take this forward by identifying and assessing suitable locations for sports facilities in consultation with young residents and landowners. This should include securing necessary permissions, piloting the use of portable or wheeled goalposts, and establishing a maintenance plan to ensure long-term use, alongside monitoring uptake and impact to inform potential replication in other Test Valley villages.

## 5.3

### Recommendation:

### Help communities to create and sustain their own community hub

Participants in both villages described a strong desire for a socially inclusive space where the community could gather informally. This 'hub' could include a café, pantry, produce stalls, information centre, co-working areas for remote workers, and occasional events (e.g. mobile food vans, pop-up bars), as well as a place to share village culture, support its present and future heritage, and support social cohesion. Participants proposed using existing infrastructure like the village hall in innovative ways and stressed the importance of not duplicating or competing with local shops. Sustainability was a key concern.

**Supports delivery of TVBC Rural Offer** Theme 1: *Identifying and Planning for Future Priorities* and Theme 2: *Development and Housing Needs*, Theme 3: *Community Resilience and Wellbeing* and Theme 4: *Rural Economy, Skills & Investment*. **Strengthen social cohesion and community identity and support the local economy through skills, space, and connectivity.**

**Next steps:** TVBC will facilitate workshops and support community members to co-design the 'hub', support a needs assessment and conduct feasibility studies to develop a business case, and assist with applying for capital and revenue grants, fostering partnerships, and develop long-term planning, drawing on lessons from villages such as Broughton.

## 5.4

### Recommendation:

### Hear the voices of all residents by using multi-layered approaches to information gathering

The group called for a richer, more inclusive approach to active citizenship that goes beyond statutory surveys and formal consultation. They proposed multi-method, community-led research that recognises local priorities and values, involves trained residents where possible, and creates capacity in research skills. This should be supported by structures to deliver tools for civic empowerment, such as NxtGen. The aim is to ensure diverse voices are heard, especially from those who might not usually engage. Ongoing, embedded engagement would support bottom-up policy making, greater trust in public institutions, and decisions that are more responsive to local needs. This approach reinforces a co-production culture where evidence from lived experience can inform future planning and governance. It also builds transferable skills within communities that are central to enhancing the rural economy.

**Supports delivery of TVBC Rural Offer** Theme 1: *Identifying and Planning for Future Priorities*. Theme 2: *Development and Housing Needs* and Theme 4: *Rural Economy, Skills & Investment*. **Promotes community-led planning, building consensus and context-sensitive development.**

**Next steps:** TVBC will enhance its community planning toolkit by incorporating creative methods used by community researchers and in the village community days to embed this approach in community-led data gathering. The council is committed to a follow up community researcher-led event to sustain momentum and has commissioned the University of Southampton to evaluate the NxtGen programme in Test Valley.



## 5.5

### Recommendation:

### **Diversify opportunities for civic engagement, particularly in light of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and embed borough councillors and parish councillors within the communities they represent**

Community members emphasised the importance of visible, relational governance. They highlight the need to diversify civic engagement to adapt to the changing needs of a working rural population who may not readily engage with traditional structures. This should include future iterations of the NxtGen programme and models of 'do-mocracy'.

Residents want councillors to lead by example, to build mutual, multidirectional relationships by attending local spaces such as coffee shops, pubs, and markets and by communicating their role and relevance to residents. A stronger presence would demystify council processes, increase transparency, and foster trust. Participants believed that when councillors are embedded in village life, residents are more likely to engage, and the community-council relationship becomes more collaborative and empowering. This becomes especially important under LGR, where borough councillors will inevitably be spread more thinly, and parish councillors/local groups/volunteers/community researchers will play an even more important bridging role. Strengthening their visibility, capacity, and legitimacy is therefore essential to sustaining community voice and delivery of local priorities.

**Supports delivery of TVBC Rural Offer Theme 1: *Identifying and Planning for Future Priorities* and Theme 2: *Development and Housing Needs*. Reimagines democratic engagement through relational governance.**

**Next Steps:** Expand NxtGen to develop a network of trained community researchers and build capacity across Test Valley. Pilot flexible engagement models, such as evening forums, rotating venues, and 'do-mocracy' projects, to suit the needs of a working rural population. Make engagement fun and interesting in order to engage communities in voluntary participation, and move away from formal meeting-based models of engagement. Develop a programme for councillors to maintain a visible presence in everyday community spaces and communicate their role clearly to residents. Equip parish councillors and local groups with training, tools, and support – including involving trained community researchers as local engagement ambassadors – to strengthen their role as connectors and empower them to deliver on their community's needs within the context of Local Government Reorganisation.

# 6. Conclusion

There is a need for “a new culture of democratic engagement” that supports the health of democracy through active citizens.<sup>48</sup> Guidance for the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill indicates that while existing town and parish councils can continue, there is an ambition for neighbourhood governance structures to work with these. It states,

“We want to make sure that all local authorities have a way of working with people in their neighbourhoods, so they are not relying on town and parish councils to do it”<sup>49</sup>

Looking to the future, **NxtGen offers a powerful model for the capacity building required to deliver locally grounded community empowerment in the context of English devolution.** At its core, the programme embodies the principle of subsidiarity by enabling residents to generate local evidence through leadership and co-creation of targeted solutions. It also promotes connectivity and relationship-building – between residents, and between residents and decision-makers – to establish foundations for effective and sustained participation, particularly in the face of change and uncertainty. In the context of Local Government Reorganisation, this subsidiarity becomes especially significant as traditional representative structures are reshaped, councillors become more thinly spread, and the limitations of parish councils are increasingly recognised.<sup>50</sup>

This report also demonstrates how **evidence acquired through NxtGen community research can be used to bring meaningful governance closer to communities.** The 5 priority recommendations that emerged encompass supporting human resilience and wellbeing, enhancing social connectedness, promoting inclusive planning, supporting the growth of the local economy and diversifying opportunities for civic engagement and active citizenship.

In this respect, **NxtGen operationalises the principles of asset-based community development,** leveraging community strengths such as volunteers, social networks, built and natural environments, and the goodwill generated through collective participation to make places better for the people who live there.

Our focus on place perception reveals the ways in which people in the villages of Barton Stacey and Lockerley experience the places where they live in relation to, and beyond, bricks and mortar. **Place is more than geography. It is designed and defined by people.**

<sup>48</sup> Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement (2018). *The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century*. Report of Session 2017-19 - published 18 April 2018 - HL Paper 118

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-bill-guidance/english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-bill-guidance>

<sup>50</sup> Ryan, M., Stoker, G., John, P., Richardson, L., Moseley, A. and James, O. (2020) *Stumbling blocks in the path of small-scale democratic politics: lessons from the experiences of parish councils in England* 16pp. <https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/494484/>

**As such it is also social and cultural.** This theme runs throughout the research results and recommendations and resonates strongly with the Community Capitals Framework, which highlights the interconnections between human, social, cultural, and natural capitals in sustaining resilient communities.

Successful rural development and the delivery of the TVBC Rural Offer must be rooted in the natural, social and cultural environments that make rural villages distinctive, and in understanding their particular needs. In this regard, the importance of natural heritage, tangible heritage (built environment) and intangible heritage (oral histories, village events and social experiences such as bonfire night, the village fete and clubs that make the rhythm of village life) are particularly striking findings. Heritage supports place-based identity, place attachment, pride in place (especially pride in community) and social cohesion, but rural communities express loss of heritage and identity. Village turnover and changes to the rural economy mean that many residents have shallow relationships to village history. They also report a marked post-covid reduction in the social experiences that create shared memories to form the heritage of tomorrow. Heritage is about people, not just buildings. Heritage is a community asset because it binds people together and is rooted in place. **The role of heritage in terms of both risks and opportunity highlighted in this report indicates the potential for heritage-led democratic engagement as a novel approach to supporting rural communities.**

**Our findings highlight the need to focus on social relations, an allied desire for community spirit, and active citizenship as pivots for future place-based development in the Test Valley;** these are central to people's wellbeing and resilience. Associated recommendations indicate how these may be supported through a range of village assets including green spaces and environmental stewardship, village halls, shops, pubs, play parks, multi-generational community events that create shared memories and enhance place attachment, and diversification of opportunities for civic engagement.

There is growing recognition of investment in wellbeing as cost-effective in reducing health and social care costs. Similarly, the role of planning in supporting wellbeing is increasingly understood, although this often stops at consideration of infrastructure and the built environment. **The changes ahead posed by Local Government Reorganisation are not merely procedural or institutional, they are cultural. Cultural problems require culture-led solutions.** In order to ensure that future place-based decision-making is shaped by those who live and work in communities in the Test Valley, tools like NxtGen are necessary to build local capacity and foster readiness for change. As a means of operationalising asset-based community development NxtGen offers a transferable blueprint for new structures and processes for evidence-based, solution-led, consensual participatory governance as a mechanism for change.

TVBC's long-standing commitment to democratic engagement and to listening to residents provides a unique opportunity for national leadership in rural planning and development. This should go beyond bricks and mortar to centre on evidence for lived experience of place that is generated by residents themselves.

# Appendix 1:

## LONG LIST OF CO-PRODUCED RECOMMENDATIONS

The community researchers identified 45 unique recommendations. For the purpose of this report the recommendations have been organised by theme and sub theme:

### Heritage

#### Create Memories and Identity

- Create memories that foster belonging and acceptance of change.
- Make people aware of the village's evolving history and identity.
- Recognise and respond to the implications of village turnover for collective identity.

#### Visibility and Preservation

- Create a repository that stores village history and makes it visible to residents and visitors (e.g. heritage walking trail, artefacts).

### Natural Environment

#### Flooding and Resilience

- Encourage tree planting to reduce flood risk.
- Bring together landowners, councils, and railway operators to create long-term solutions for flooding under the railway bridge.
- Clean rivers and ditches as a joint community action.

#### Biodiversity and Access

- Celebrate and protect local wildlife.
- Preserve local flora and fauna during development.
- Protect allotments as valued community green space.
- Ensure access to rivers for paddling and enjoyment.
- Create public, community-led garden spaces.

## Planning

### Housing

- Build housing that reflects the needs of the community, not just developers.
- Prioritise affordable 2–3 bedroom homes over large luxury developments.
- Increase availability of social housing to support diverse residents.
- Secure the future of younger generations through affordable housing.
- Maintain key lines of sight in the village while evaluating development locations with nuance.

## Transport and Accessibility

- Provide a community bus or better transport to Romsey or train stations.
- Explore vehicles to support residents in adverse weather.
- Research the impact of car dependency on those unable to drive.
- Ensure safe footpaths connecting different parts of the village.
- Develop a boardwalk connecting Lockerley, Mottisfont, and Dunbridge Station.
- Introduce traffic calming measures on Lockerley Road.
- Improve safe passage past Lockerley Motors.
- Ensure local business operations (e.g. garage) do not compromise village integrity.



## Community Assets and Action

### Key Village Assets

Protect the local shop as a vital community resource.

### Meetings

- Shift from formal parish meetings to resourced, informal community gatherings.
- Create enabling conditions for engagement such as parties, tree-guardian schemes, and transgenerational activities.
- Support community-led initiatives modelled on “Do-mocracy” (e.g. village-wide clean-up weeks).
- Recognise and empower local community leaders (“Every village needs a Brenda”).

### Shared Spaces

- Establish a central social space open seven days a week.
- Hold regular monthly gatherings in accessible community locations.
- Consider developing a multi-functional hub (first aid, responders, events).
- Support creation or revitalisation of a village pub or social café.

### Events and Social Life

- Organise large-scale community events to build cohesion.
- Host inclusive BBQs, drinks nights, quizzes, and intergenerational festivals.
- Celebrate village agriculture through harvest festivals and farmers’ markets.
- Introduce mobile food vans and consider unique events (e.g. village rodeo).
- Expand opportunities for young and middle-aged adults to connect socially.

### Youth and Play

- Create or upgrade playparks on the village green.
- Install goalposts or other sports facilities for teenagers on Butts Green.

## Communication and Connection

### Infrastructure and Inclusion

- Improve mobile phone coverage across the village.
- Support a “volunteer bank” that allows residents to contribute to hands-on tasks and build community spirit.
- Develop mechanisms to stay connected during communication outages.
- Improve communication of village events and groups, especially for newcomers.

## Skills and Learning

- Continue developing community skills through initiatives like the NxtGen.
- Provide opportunities for residents to learn, contribute, and lead.
- Community understanding.

## Further Research

- Conduct further research focused on villagers who are isolated or at risk of isolation.
- Capture emotional and qualitative experiences of place through psychogeography and creative methods, not just surveys.

**Beyond Bricks and Mortar: Results and  
Recommendations of the NxtGen Community Researcher  
Training Programme in Barton Stacey and Lockerley**

**ISBN: 978-1-912431-48-9 (electronic)**

**ISBN: 978-1-912431-58-8 (printed)**

**Published by the University of Southampton  
2025**

