

21 DECEMBER 2021

PR 24-21 | BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY: CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON THE ROLE OF BUSINESS IN PLACE BASED REGENERATION

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the nationally recognised membership and support organisation representing the interests of around 10,000 local (parish and town) councils and many parish meetings in England, 70% of which are situated in rural areas. Local councils are the backbone of our democracy and closest to local people, providing our neighbourhoods, villages, towns and small cities with a democratic voice and structure for action, contributing in excess of £2 billion of community investment to supporting and improving local communities and delivering neighbourhood level services.

Context

- Our current understanding of place-based regeneration is that it is engagement by all tiers of local government in the local area with local companies, businesses, service providers and the community to build infrastructure that meets community and business needs and supports economic development.
- To effectively contribute to place-based regeneration, national and local businesses, SMEs and social enterprises can engage with the local community to identify and address needs that contribute to livelihood and wellbeing, support place based work such as that advocated by the IPM, provide funding, raise awareness of the role of local (parish and town) councils in the area and provide information and guidance on new ways of working.
- A number of key internal factors enable commitment to a long term, placed based regeneration project, including communication, resources (including staff resources) motivation, local knowledge and decision making, understanding, funding and commitment.

NALC's responses to the consultation questions are as follows:

Q1. What is your current understanding or definition of place-based regeneration?

Our current understanding of place based regeneration is that it is engagement by all tiers of local government in the local area with local companies, businesses, service providers and the community to build infrastructure that meets community and business needs and supports economic development.

Q2. Has your organisation been involved in any place-based regeneration efforts? (If yes, please outline the name of the initiative, it's start date, what was done.)

Any number of NALC's members have been involved in place based regeneration efforts and on a variety of different scales. Three specific examples are given below:

- Hexham Town Council, Northumberland: Hexham High Street Heritage Action Zone (current)
- Berwick on Tweed Town Council, Northumberland: Berwick Regeneration Commission, Berwick Coastal Communities Team and Berwick Town Forum. The council has completed substantial pieces of work on place branding and economic development and has supported the successful bid to the Borderlands Scheme for £15M to redevelop the town's theatre. In addition, the council has secured funding towards the creation of a cultural and creative zone.
- Sevenoaks Town Council, Kent: master planning, recovery plans, community investment plan, green investment plan.

On a smaller scale, many local councils either organise or support events such as street parties and artisan markets which attract many visitors from their wider catchment area.

Q3. How successful have the initiatives your organisation has engaged in been gauged to be? Please detail: What made it a success? Any challenges or failures that you faced If or how your organisation exited the initiative? Anything you would do differently now to improve the outcome?

- Hexham Town Council, Northumberland: ongoing.
- Berwick on Tweed Town Council, Northumberland: not able to comment in a survey, all relevant reports published.
- Sevenoaks Town Council, Kent: success equals community and business support and involvement, saving and building assets increasing local GDP. The challenges include a lack of support from government and other tiers of local government and no direct access to government funding and grants.

Although the most common initiatives are one off special events, the holding of these in towns and villages remind visitors of the attractions of those places and many local businesses report that they enjoy their best trading days in a year when they are held.

Q4. What can national and local businesses, SMEs and social enterprises do to effectively contribute to place-based regeneration?

To effectively contribute to place based regeneration, national and local businesses, SME's and social enterprises can engage with the local community to identify and address needs that contribute to livelihood and wellbeing, support place based work such as that advocated by the IPM, provide funding, raise awareness of the role of local (parish and town) councils in the area and provide information and guidance on new ways of working.

Q5. What motivates businesses to engage in regeneration in a specific place? Please rank the following in order of importance (1 being the most important, 7 the least)

Our ranking is as follows:

1. opportunities for business development
2. clustering of customers/clients
3. location of current/future operations
4. clustering of employees
5. opportunities to develop a current or future pipeline talent plan
6. the place with the greatest need

7. historical links

Q6. Are there any other motivations, not captured above, that might motivate businesses to engage in regeneration in a place? Do you have any other additional comments?

Yes, local investment of a percentage of business rates.

Q7. What business-benefits are there to engaging in place-based regeneration?

We believe there are several business benefits to engaging in place based regeneration, including community engagement, local pride, PR for the company and a better understanding of what they offer and how their policies can support the work of other organisations in the area.

Q8. What key internal factors enable commitment to a long-term, place-based regeneration project? Please list below. This could include factors such as funding or staff resource.

A number of key internal factors enable commitment to a long-term, placed based regeneration project, including communication, resources (including staff resources) motivation, local knowledge and decision making, understanding, funding and commitment.

Q9. In which thematic areas in a place is business engagement likely to have the greatest impact? Please rank the following (1 being the greatest impact, and 8 being the least):

Our ranking is as follows:

1. skills and employability
2. high street regeneration
3. climate change
4. inward investment
5. connectivity
6. education
7. health (mental or physical)
8. inequality

Q10. Are there any other areas, not captured above, where business might have impact? Do you have any additional comments?

Yes, businesses often sponsor local events and facilities

Q11. How would you rate the current environment as being conducive to businesses contributing to regeneration efforts? Where 1 is not at all conducive, and 10 being highly conducive

Our rating is 6.50

Q12. What barriers exist to business-engagement in place-based working? What action is needed to overcome these? What legislative/regulatory changes might make it easier for business to engage?

A number of barriers exist to business-engagement in place based working, including time, lack of resources and understanding, hollowing out of large businesses so that local managers have very little autonomy and frustration from businesses that the local council cannot make local decisions.

Q13. Do you feel the best way for a business to contribute to place-based regeneration is through a collaborative partnership or independent action? Why?

The best way for a business to contribute to place based regeneration is through a collaborative partnership. So much more can be achieved by working in partnership, as there is less duplication and you can use the expertise of others.

Sevenoaks Town Council, Kent have told us they would not have been as successful without continuous support from local businesses.

Q14. In a partnership between local government, business and civil society, which actor is best suited to lead in relation to each of the following:

Our answers are as follows:

- a) setting strategy: business
- b) making sense of and responding to changes amongst internal partners and the external operating environment: civility society and business

- c) providing funds: local government
- d) accessing and managing resources: civil society
- e) providing experience, knowledge and assets: business
- f) advocating for the place: business
- g) problem solving and the ability to cut through complex problems: local government
- h) evaluating impact: business.

Q15. Is any action needed to improve collaborative working between businesses, public sector bodies, community organisations, and others? Do any frameworks for this currently exist?

Yes, frameworks need to be created where they don't already exist. Where they already exist, they need to be local and sensitive to reality on the ground.

Whilst town partnerships work well, more devolvement would help such as with licensing.

Q16. Are existing policies and funds, such as the Towns Fund, Levelling-Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund, effective at encouraging businesses engagement in place-based working?

They can be if the process is guided and led by skilled practitioners and aimed at the right targets. However, we are aware of frustrations from local businesses because such policies and funding cannot be accessed directly. Nor can it be accessed by local councils. As the first tier of local government, local councils should be able to access funding for the same initiatives that principal authorities can.

Q17. What level of government do you feel is best suited to have a positive effective on place-based efforts? Please rank the following from most positive to least

Our ranking is as follows:

- district council or unitary authority
- devolved
- central
- county council

- city region

Q18. To what extent is it currently possible to gain consensus across sectors and within the community to develop a 'vision' for individual places? What role should business play in this?

Currently it is only possible to gain consensus across sectors and within the community to a very limited extent. This is perhaps most evident at a local level. Elsewhere there are too many conflicts for decisions to be made and funding to be secured. Cross sector communication is limited.

Businesses need to engage with an open mind, and with an awareness of the medium term. They can support a partnership of organisations working together to develop a vision for individual places.

Q19. To what extent should place-based regeneration involve the local community? What benefits does community engagement bring? What are the challenges?

To a great extent. Place based regeneration will fail without community buy in, although outline plans need to be developed before consultation commences.

Benefits of community of engagement include a sense of ownership, belonging and awareness as well as ongoing support and local pride.

Q20. What can be done to ensure that place-based regeneration reduces racial or ethnic inequalities? What role should business play in this?

Recruitment processes need to be transparent and those not traditionally represented need to be encouraged to apply.

Businesses need to listen, to engage, and to be willing to be led where necessary. They also need to ensure the needs of all employees are understood.

Q21. Are there any lessons that were learnt during the Covid-19 pandemic, where we saw an increase in community self-organisation and cross-sector collaboration, that we should carry forwards? Do you think the increased use of digital technology since the start of the pandemic has changed the ability of businesses to contribute to a place?

The use of digital technology has broken down some barriers, however, we must remember that not everyone has the facilities or is sufficiently confident in the use of technology. We must never lose sight of the need to engage in conversation and to encourage face to face dialogue. This assists in reducing social isolation, too.

Q22. What are the most effective ways of evaluating the impact of place-based regenerative working? What existing measurement frameworks exist?

The most effective ways of evaluating the impact of place-based regenerative working include having a base line and evaluating against it such as a reduction in crime, increased footfall and setting goals.

Should you require any further information on this response please do not hesitate to contact Jessica Lancod-Frost, policy officer, on 020 7290 0319 or via email at Jessica.Lancod-frost@nalc.gov.uk.