

Local Trust
trusting
local
people



The halfway point

Reflections
on Big Local



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Foreword

Big Local is the largest single endowment ever made by the National Lottery Community Fund. The sum of £200m is matched by the ambition of the programme: 150 communities given the freedom to make their own decisions on what is best for their area.

This publication marks several milestones. In 2019, the National Lottery celebrates its 25th birthday – 25 years of giving to good causes across the UK. In Big Local, the areas allocated £1m each of National Lottery funding have now crossed the halfway point in their 10–15-year spending plans, with many lessons learned along the way. We feel that this is a perfect moment to share some of the valuable knowledge gained from these brilliant communities.

When the programme was launched in 2011, it was in many ways a huge leap of faith. The underpinning belief — that by giving funds to communities with almost no strings attached, it might be possible to achieve outcomes that have eluded top-down public sector funding and more traditional project-based grant programmes — was untested. Our approach to outcomes was to emphasise that the development of trust, confidence, skills and partnerships at a local level was just as important as the sorts of hard project-based outcomes that can dominate traditional funding. This was, in many ways, ground-breaking.

Yet, as we hope you will see from this publication, the Big Local model has already made a real and lasting difference to the communities making it happen, and we believe it can go even further. As neighbourhoods overcome past and present inequalities, take on ever more ambitious challenges and surpass expectations, there is now evidence to suggest the impacts of Big Local will be sustained over the long term. Since that initial leap in the dark, a compelling vision has begun to take on form and definition. We are coming to see that it really is possible for funders to give money and support in completely new and innovative ways, with residents in the lead.

It is our aim to share what we have learnt from Big Local far and wide — with government, local authorities, funders, public and private sectors — everyone who wants to make their area an even better place to live. We hope that you will benefit from the incredible depth of practical learning and experience Big Local offers and the opportunities and challenges associated with making it a reality.

Matt Leach
Chief executive
Local Trust

Different by design

Local Trust was established in 2012 to deliver Big Local, a Big Lottery-funded programme which committed £1m each to 150 neighbourhoods across England. The £217m originally provided by the Big Lottery Fund to support this programme is the largest single-purpose, lottery-funded endowment ever made, and the biggest-ever investment by a non-state funder in place-based, resident-led change.

In terms of scale, time horizon and ethos, nothing like Big Local has ever existed. Designed from the outset to be radically different from other funding programmes, Big Local has at its heart a vision of empowered, resilient, dynamic, asset-rich communities making their own decisions on what is best for their area.

Communities in control

In contrast to conventional top-down, time-limited, project-led funding, the funding awarded to each Big Local area was provided on the basis that it could be spent over 10-15 years at the communities' own chosen pace and according to their own plans and priorities.

To secure the funding, resident-led partnerships of local volunteers work together to form a common vision for their area and agree priorities, in order to make a difference to the things that matter most to their community. The outcomes set for Big Local at its outset were deliberately broad to provide maximum scope for communities to set their own priorities, and were as follows:

- Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them.
- People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future.
- The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises.
- People will feel that their area is an even better place to live.

To help them make the most of their opportunity, residents involved in Big Local are supported in developing and delivering their plans by an extensive programme of training, networking and light-touch, on-the-ground support provided by Local Trust and its partners.

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Half way in

Big Local will come to an end in 2026. As the programme reaches its halfway point, Local Trust has reflected on progress so far by responding to the twenty questions that are most commonly asked.

This document is therefore not an academic evaluation of Big Local, a how-to guide, or a policy paper. Rather, its intention is to share some of the learning that has been gathered by Local Trust as it has set up, managed and supported the Big Local programme.

It is published as one of a range of research, essays and reports designed to contribute to current discussions about the challenges of designing and delivering place-based funding programmes; how places are changing; and what does or does not help them become better places to live.



Big Local gives space and support for people to find their way. It lets them find their own voice.

Big Local: Twenty questions

1. What makes Big Local different from other funding programmes?

Big Local was established with a number of core key features that make it different from other programmes. It is:

- *Long term*—providing certainty and continuity over 10-15 years;
- *Resident-led*—working directly with individuals who live, work, study and play in areas, rather than through organisations; and building confidence and capacity amongst those wanting to make a difference to their community and their local area;
- *Non-prescriptive*—enabling residents to spend money on their own terms and in their own time, on the projects they judge to be most important to them;
- *Patient and non-judgmental*—giving communities the time and opportunity to learn, make mistakes, resolve disagreements and overcome challenges for themselves, on their way to achieving their ambitions;
- *Accompanied by flexible and responsive support*—to help communities build the confidence and capability to make the most of the opportunities available to them, whilst not constraining their own ambition and initiative.

The long-term commitment is particularly key. Big Local funding is provided for 10 to 15 years. It means that there is time for the local residents delivering it to grow in

confidence and skills, for individuals to be closely involved or step back, for strong networks to develop with other important local players, and for people to plan and deliver their chosen projects without the constraint of time-limited budgets or externally imposed deadlines.

It leaves scope for residents to agree their own priorities, try a range of different approaches, take risks, make mistakes and recover from them, and review and learn, including from and with other Big Local areas. It recognises that significant change in any place takes time and has to be founded on and around the people who live there—something that is absent from many shorter-term, project-based initiatives.

The relationship that Local Trust has with the communities it supports is very different from the relationship that funders typically have with beneficiaries. Local Trust devolves as much of the power as possible to communities. The partnerships decide how to spend *their* money. There are very few strings attached. Local Trust is there primarily to provide support.

Also, because of the long-term nature of the programme, the extent to which areas feel connected, both to Local Trust and to other communities with Big Local funding, is significantly different from that between conventionally funded groups and funders. There is a considerable level of investment in peer-to-peer learning, community-to-community networking and the sharing of ideas and experiences, both face to face and, increasingly, online.

2. Why £1m and why these 150 places?

Big Local areas were selected by the National Lottery Community Fund in 2010 to 2012, in collaboration with local authorities and local civil society organisations. Many of the places selected as Big Local areas suffered from low levels of civic activity—they were chosen because they had not received what was perceived to be their fair share of lottery funding, typically because of a lack of community organization, organized activity, or advocacy to bring funding into the area.

Nonetheless, £1m spent over 10 to 15 years in areas with an average population of 7,500 is not such a lot of money. In material terms, it goes further in areas with low costs and land values. Perceptions also count. In our major cities, communities may perceive that their Big Local funding is overshadowed by a billion-pound development project around the corner, perhaps with its own grant-giving priorities.

The £1m available to each Big Local area over 10 to 15 years both makes all the difference and very little difference. It makes all the difference because it is what brings people together in the first place;

it tends to secure a place at the table for the community when important local issues are being discussed (something explored by David Boyle in his essay *The Grammar of Change*); and it provides leverage, enabling areas to raise funding from other sources. It makes very little difference because what it can buy is of secondary importance to the difference that delivering the programme makes to the confidence and skills of local people.

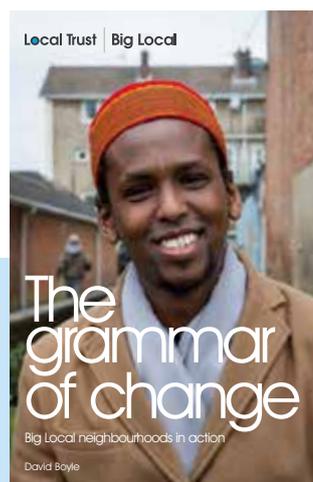
In any one year, across all 150 Big Local areas over 1600 local people are involved directly in the governance of their Big Local. Up to a third of those who join Big Local have never been involved in community volunteering in the past. In many ways the money provided by Big Local is less important than compared to the value of the community time, commitment and passion mobilised.

 You could say that £1m is the Goldilocks figure. Big enough to get community members interested in it. Not so big that it attracts swarms of consultants wanting to help areas spend it.



Youth provision has life-changing potential. Four Big Local areas – Wick Award, Church Hill, Stoke North and Coastal Community

Challenge – are choosing to prioritise the welfare of young people. In this essay, Antony Mason suggests that the Big Local approach to filling this gap in services could inspire a national re-think on youth policy and funding.



Author David Boyle wrote the first in our series of essays about the potential released by the Big Local approach and what it really takes to create local change.

3. What support is provided to communities?

Big Local demonstrates the value of light-touch support. Local Trust is very careful not to over-manage Big Local communities, or flood them with professionals tasked with managing the way they choose to deliver their programme. Core aspects of the offer are:

- Paid local reps who work with each area on average one to two days a month. Several reps support more than one area and some work with as many as five;
- LTOs (Locally Trusted Organisations) who administer the funding locally, produce reports on expenditure for Local Trust, act as an employer of workers and, in many areas, deliver activities;

- National support partners who can be drawn on by local communities to provide support on demand with a range of specialist issues—for example, land management and community-asset transfer;
- Peer-to-peer networking and learning programmes, as well as formal skills development.

The majority of Big Local partnerships use some of their cash to employ workers, typically, to provide administrative support, assistance with community development and engagement and—where more ambitious projects are being taken on—support with project management and delivery.



Local Trust

Provides long-term, resident-led funding with almost no strings attached. Each Big Local area receives £1.1m and a programme of support over 10-15 years.

Big Local rep

Tailored support

- Informs, connects and supports Big Local partnerships
- Shares successes, challenges and news with Local Trust

Big Local

150 Big Local partnerships decide how to use £1.1m to meet local needs

- Must be at least 8 people and at least 51% residents
- Policies, processes and structure decided by the group
- Typically unconstituted

Worker

Paid employee

- Delivers workplan decided by Big Local partnership
- May bring community development skills
- Often lives nearby or is a resident

May be one part time worker or a small team

Locally Trusted Organisation

Legal entity

- Chosen by the partnership
- Managed and administers local funding
- Provides administrative services if needed

4. How do communities stay on track?

The programme has an ethos of support for learning and continuous improvement. A good example of this is the approach taken to supporting the development of Big Local plans. The initial plans developed by partnerships are assessed by external assessors contracted by Local Trust. The focus of the assessment is on whether areas are responding to comments on the previous iteration of the plan and appear to be learning through involvement in the process. The feedback helps areas ensure that their plans are robust and deliverable.

There is also a plan review at least once within the funding period. A number of questions are considered in reviews: how well are partnership members working together; how are they responding to challenges; how are partnerships negotiating difficult decisions; how successfully are they managing delivery of big projects? No judgement is made about the content of the plans developed by the partnership. The focus is on whether the partnership is functioning and growing in capacity.



Winterton 2022 Big Local is investing in its future by providing apprenticeships in partnership with local businesses in North Lincolnshire. The project has so far trained almost 20 apprentices across a variety of industries, such as Beth, who is currently undertaking a medicine dispensary apprenticeship.

5. What is the theory of change?

Another aspect of the programme that is considered important is a neutral position as to methods and approaches. The Community Development Foundation (CDF), one of the original partners in the delivery consortium that established Local Trust, ensured that Big Local took an asset-based approach, and initially used community-development methods to engage people.

Beyond that, 'method wars' have been avoided, and an effort has been made to pick what seems to work from amongst the wide range of community-focused methodologies and approaches on offer. Changes in the reps assigned over time have brought a range of different approaches, backgrounds and experiences to many areas, enabling them to discover the best ways to deliver on their shared ambitions.

The programme has, as a consequence, been relatively unconstrained by any top-down theory of change. Although one was prepared in 2012, it was quickly seen as over-complex and not fully reflective of experience on the ground, and has now been largely side-lined as a tool for managing the programme. Seven years on, Local Trust is now thinking much more about learning, and whether programmes like Big Local might benefit from more responsive hypotheses and lines of enquiry, focused on understanding what is happening rather than on predetermined models of how things are expected to work.



Gateshead Big Local has set up a cycling club with a strong social, as well as fitness, focus. They have purchased five bikes for members to borrow and accessed training around risk assessment and ride-planning. "We're not going to put on the lycra and break any world records! Everybody does things at their own pace. But there are people who wouldn't have met each other without this group," says Andrew Tinkler, Project Manager of Gateshead Big Local.

6. How does the Big Local community-led approach play out in practice?

The emphasis on resident or community empowerment is embraced by staff and is very motivating. However, the model has its challenges. For example, decisions about local priorities or spending can generate conflicts or complaints. This can be very stressful for partnership members to deal with. It can also be difficult for local reps and Local Trust staff when these issues are referred to them. Local Trust itself—while it will attempt to help areas resolve their differences—tries to avoid being drawn in to arbitrate as any sort of higher authority, not least because this undermines its focus on avoiding the conventional power dynamics that can exist between funder and grant recipient. However, the fact that conflicts inevitably arise, and that the people most closely involved are volunteers who live in the area and so cannot escape the conflict, means that the programme demands a high level of resilience from those involved.

Generally in Big Local areas, a few people in the community shoulder the burden and do the bulk of the work. A partnership is typically made up of 10 to 12 local residents, although many more may be involved as volunteers or participants in wider, funded activity. While most areas work hard to involve more local residents, this can prove difficult. However, most partnerships are successful at renewing themselves and getting new residents involved, even if in many areas the burden of responsibility can tend to fall on a core of long-term volunteers.

It is important that the level of responsibility that is placed on the key individuals who make the programme work is recognised, and appropriate support provided. This

aspect of the programme can mean that some of those involved are the usual suspects—established, local-community activists. But at any one time, about a third of those involved are new to this sort of activity, suggesting that, with support, programmes like Big Local can be an engine of increased participation. Levels of commitment for those engaged are high across all age groups, with around 15 per cent of those under 64, and 25 per cent of those over 64, putting in 10 or more hours a week supporting delivery of the programme in their areas.



Places to meet, connectivity and an active, engaged community are vital to secure better social and economic outcomes for deprived neighbourhoods. Without them, rates of unemployment, child poverty, and poor health are higher, and areas fall further behind. For the first time, this report presents a statistically-robust 'community needs' index, helping policy makers find new solutions to 'level up' civic infrastructure and improve connectivity and community engagement.



7. How are partnerships engaging their communities?

Often partnerships use traditional methods of engagement: newsletters, surveys and events. But many report that they find it difficult to get people to engage. Events with free food tend to attract the most people, but often those attending are not interested in a deeper level of participation. In some areas, we are seeing partnerships starting to experiment with new meeting formats and ways of decision-making, which have been successful in bringing in a wider section of the community—for instance, Brookside Big Local holds meetings in the late afternoon, providing food and allowing children to attend. This has opened up meetings to mothers of young children who might otherwise not have been able to get involved.

Generally, it seems that many local people are more willing to participate in events and activities that are perceived as fun, but can struggle to commit to participating in the more formal decision-making and coordinating structures that underpin programme delivery.

One early frustration that partnerships reported was that the Big Local name was not known. It was not a brand that people recognised, and communities did not understand what it was. This meant that it could be difficult to promote community involvement in the areas. However, as areas move towards bigger projects and more visible change on the ground, there is a sense that many are starting to successfully establish their own local profile and feel less reliant on recognition of a national Big Local brand to engage successfully with their community.

8. What are the types of project that partnerships undertake?

The plans prepared by partnerships reflect some common priorities: green spaces, young people, employment and the local economy, intergenerational work, loneliness and isolation amongst older people, and community hubs or other community spaces. Often, areas start with the more tangible or obvious issues, such as provision of play spaces driven by early enthusiasm to 'deliver what local people say they want'. Once they grow in confidence and develop knowledge about who to work with and how to secure influence, they may start to use their position to lead debates about trickier local issues. For example, some areas are attempting to tackle issues such as poverty, domestic abuse and violence against women, drugs and gangs—the issues that people often don't want to acknowledge or talk about, and where solutions are often seen as the responsibility of external agencies or the state, rather than something that local people can achieve.

 **The clear simple rule from the beginning was that the programme should be resident-led. This became the mantra that we could constantly go back to when working with others, including councils.**

9. Are there people 'on the ground' in each area?

Big Local reps are Local Trust's people on the ground, acting as their eyes, ears and voice, and the main contact between the areas and Local Trust. They provide basic advice and support, and signpost partnerships to sources of information and advice on specific issues. Typically, they have a community development, regeneration or voluntary-sector development background. While the reps may have some knowledge of the areas that they support, an understanding of a particular locality is not a requirement of the role. This is because the community itself has this expertise, which also enables reps to be impartial and neutral facilitators without a history with, or deep knowledge of, local people and politics.

Their role is not to 'do stuff' for the partnership but instead provide support, ideas, inspiration, mentoring and challenge. Reps network with their peers and sometimes organise events for areas; and they have developed guidance on issues or topics their areas are grappling with which they share with their peers. Often, they are involved in other community initiatives and programmes, and bring this expertise and their own networks to support their Big Local areas.

Reps continue to be an important part of the programme, and have a collective insight into the programme and the local areas that is of real value.

Reflections from Big Local reps

Partnerships in some areas formed organically because people in the area had come together before, perhaps to campaign on a particular issue. In other areas it was more difficult to form the partnership.

Because there was the promise of £1m to spend, it tended to be the case that the first people around the table were representatives from the council and local voluntary organisations. Efforts had to be made to bring in residents. One difficulty in getting them involved was that communities define their own boundaries, and the boundaries of many Big Local areas do not reflect these natural boundaries.

One of the most important decisions that Local Trust took early on was to provide development funding in the form of small grants to get partnerships started with the consultation and planning process. These grants were in addition to each area's £1m. They gave partnerships the confidence to get on and to address issues.

In many areas, enthusiasm dipped once the plan was approved. A few people dropped out. There was a real sense of "and now we have to implement it too!" Some of the approved plans were too rigid; it's important that they can be adapted in response to what the community is saying.

An interesting dynamic is that while Local Trust has a very open-minded approach and has made very few rules about how money from the Big Local programme can be spent, LTOs are making rules. This is because some partnerships struggle without clear parameters.

The role of the LTO is a very valuable one. And it's important to have the right organisation in the role. In many areas, particularly in the early days, LTOs played a key role in building trust. This was particularly the case in areas where there were divisions or unnatural boundaries in the community.

Summary of reflections from Big Local reps, provided in a session from the programme about early learning.

10. Do Big Local areas employ workers?

Most of the Big Local areas have a worker. Fewer than five per cent do not invest in any paid staff time. In most instances, these staff are employed through the LTO, as (where it has not chosen to incorporate) the Big Local partnership does not have the ability to directly employ staff.

In the majority of areas, it took a while for partnerships to recognize the benefits of paid staff. At the start of Big Local, areas often wanted to be in full control of their plans and activities, and secured this by doing all of the work themselves. This may also have felt consistent with a community-led approach. Over time, more partnerships learned that employing workers was a more appropriate way to take their plans forward, and that doing so strengthened their role as decision-makers as well as doers.

There was, and still is, a reluctance in some partnerships to spend money on staff support. Rightly, the £1m is regarded as a very precious resource and partnership members feel an enormous responsibility to use it well. This can mean that they want to do as much of the work as possible themselves, as opposed to paying others to do it. However, areas that depend solely on volunteers, or whose workers are on very limited hours, are among those finding it hardest to deliver all that they have set out to do. Those that have chosen to invest in staff have often found that they have been able to achieve more, faster, and also to bring in additional resources—for example through increased capacity to build partnerships and access grant-funding—that offset the expense of employment.

11. How is accountability secured for local spending?

In most cases, Big Local partnerships are unconstituted groups. This is deliberate, as Local Trust sought not to impose excessive bureaucratic requirements on local residents, such as charity registration, in order to access funds. However, it has meant that, in each area, local partnerships have needed to select a Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO), which can hold money and make contracts on behalf of local residents. LTOs are an important part of the architecture of the programme, as they are the bodies that administer and account for Big Local funding on behalf of the partnerships, and report to Local Trust on how funds are being used. They deploy their own established policies and procedures to ensure that the distribution of the money meets the terms set out in our conditions of funding. In some instances, they are local, voluntary-sector infrastructure organisations, such as Community Voluntary Services, small local charities and development trusts. In a few areas, community foundations have taken on the role, as have housing associations, local authorities and, on occasion, local small businesses.

The core part of the LTO function is to deliver activities and services set out in the funding agreement and report to Local Trust on spend. LTOs provide timely and accurate information to the partnership to help inform decision-making and to host the employment contracts of Big Local workers. They also ensure that there is accountability to the local community. Many LTOs have embraced the role as a new opportunity to work co-operatively and more closely with residents to design and develop plans for the area. In some instances, the LTO is an established part of the Big Local area and has detailed knowledge and experience that it shares with the partnership in order to develop solutions and ideas in response to the priorities identified.

The LTO role can be a difficult one. The situation of being accountable for a funding and reporting agreement with a funder, while being led by an unconstituted group of residents, is new to most. LTOs have sometimes felt unclear about how they fit in, and about the interplay between a resident-led programme and their own accountability to Local Trust for the effective oversight of the funding. They can also end up dealing with relationships that have broken down locally and navigating disputes. This can take up a significant amount of time and can lead to either confusion or discontent, or both, about what their roles and responsibilities are and the extent to which the management fee paid to them by Local Trust is sufficient to cover them. (LTOs receive a fee from Local Trust amounting to 5% of area spend, although some have negotiated additional payments from their local area for the provision of additional support or facilities.)

LTOs have not been immune to the challenges facing local civil-society organisations and some have, on occasion, gone out of business, leading to problems for their Big Local partnership. While Local Trust carries out due-diligence checks on LTOs before appointment, it has increasingly had to implement wider, risk-based, financial scrutiny of LTOs on an ongoing basis, to minimize the likelihood of their failure putting Big Local funding or local delivery at risk.

12. Do areas also receive support in delivering their specific activities?

At the start of the programme, there was an emphasis on providing support to areas on particular issues: local economic development, environmental improvement and equality of access to goods and services. Sometimes it was difficult to ensure that support was of a kind, or delivered in a way that met the particular needs of local areas—providers tended to have established methodologies or approaches they were reluctant to depart from. This was addressed, and at least one support offer changed radically in the first years of the programme. Another issue was that some types of support came too early in the journey for most areas or were targeted at issues it turned out had little relevance to Big Local areas. A good example, perhaps, is support with social investment. Initially, a number of reps were nominated as social investment reps, but there was little call on their services.

In 2018, new, pilot-support offers were launched. These sought to better respond to the needs identified by the areas in their plans and were also an attempt to broaden horizons, connecting the areas with different approaches and ways of thinking.

Shared Assets now provides support with land management, asset transfers and community buildings. The Media Trust's offer is support with communications and managing websites. Streetgames supports areas seeking to find new ways of teaching sport and physical activity. In each case, a small clutch of areas participate in a pilot, with a wider offer rolled out once it has demonstrated the xxx local venture to Big Local areas.

However, because of the diversity of priorities in Big Local plans, and differences around the skills and expertise of partnerships, Local Trust isn't able to provide support to every area to deliver their specific activities; instead, we encourage areas to consider what specialist support they might require and to commission it themselves.

13. Do residents have access to training?

Local Trust quickly identified gaps and issues around learning and networking and developed an offer for local areas. Early in the process, many areas requested access to training (for example, in chairing meetings and dealing with difficult behaviour and conflicts), and a training programme was developed and delivered by the Directory of Social Change (DSC), Northern College and Talk Action. Training themes were identified on the basis of surveys of the reps and from issues that emerged in complaints. Courses were targeted at residents, including chairs or vice chairs of partnerships; workers were able to attend but the training was not designed with them in mind.

However, over time, it became clear that much of the take-up of formal training programmes was being drawn not from interest in the subject matter of particular courses (although this remained important) but by a desire on the part of Big Local areas to meet and network with other areas.

A third iteration of the Big Local learning and networking programme, seeking to respond to this demand. Its aspiration is to:

...create a more enabling culture across Big Local. It will provide inspiration, focus more on the long term and help to forge deeper connections across the areas.

At the heart of this programme is a renewed offer, based around peer-to-peer learning, community-to-community networking, and the sharing of ideas and experiences, both face to face and, increasingly, online. This includes a range of learning clusters on issues including housing, serious youth violence, coastal

communities, project management, local transport, and environmental issues.

We have become increasingly aware of the importance of supporting individuals as leaders in their communities. Taking on this sort of role can present all sorts of pressures and responsibilities that, were they part of a formal job in the public or private sectors, would be supported by a range of training in personal effectiveness, emotional resilience and wider leadership skills. In 2019, a leadership programme, the Community Leadership Academy, was launched to address some of these issues and generate learning that can be more widely applied across communities beyond Big Local.



As Big Local areas chose to use arts and creativity to transform their neighbourhoods, are they at the forefront of a major cultural shift? Within the context of the Arts Council England's proposed strategy for 2020-2030 which puts the expansion of opportunities for every citizen to do creative things at its core, Maddy Costa visits four Big Local areas to see what they are doing.

SUPPORT FROM Big Local 2019

As the Big Local programme reaches the half way mark, here's some of the support available to all Big Local areas in 2019.

- localtrust.org.uk
- [@LocalTrust](https://twitter.com/LocalTrust)
- [Facebook.com/localtrustbiglocal](https://www.facebook.com/localtrustbiglocal)

Big Local reps



2019: This year is a good time for partnerships to talk to their rep about their support needs, now and in the future.

What they do

- Work closely with Big Local partnerships to make sure they are informed, connected and supported
- Help partnerships access additional support when needed
- Share key successes, challenges and news with Local Trust
- Revised core assignment starts 2019.



LEARNING & NETWORKING WITH Big Local

Share your knowledge and learn from other Big Local areas, residents, LTOs, workers and support partners

FREE
and costs covered.
Find out more from
your rep

- **Learning clusters:** Join a group of 10+ Big Local areas to explore a topic or skill together through peer learning. You will meet 4 times and be guided by an expert facilitator from a Local Trust partner organisation. Locations agreed by the group.
- **Regional clusters:** Meet up with nearby partnerships and a rep facilitator in your region. Decide together when and where to meet. If there is not a regional cluster near you, ask your rep about setting one up.
- **Learning events:** Attend one-off events on major or strategic topics such as leadership or youth facilities. Run over 1 or 2 days, these events are open to all Big Local areas.
- **Measuring change:** Take part in a new series of training sessions with other Big Local partnerships. Access tailored advice and support from specialist researchers to learn how to 'count what matters' in your community.





SAVE THE DATE

Big Local Connects is a unique event where every Big Local can come together for learning, networking and celebration.

In 2019, it's in Nottingham on 13 and 14 September.



2019: More Learning Clusters coming soon including Making projects happen and Campaigning for social change.

Support Partners

Aimed at any Big Local area who wants fresh insight on an underlying issue or expert support to deliver a key project

- Work closely with partner organisations previously piloted by Local Trust – a 3-way partnership with residents in the lead
- Partners working directly with you in your local area
- Access hassle-free, tailored support
- Unlock additional funding from Local Trust – we will match the financial contribution made by each Big Local area.

Costs
**£5,000 -
 £15,000**
 for Big Local areas,
 match-funded by
 Local Trust

2019: Look out for new announcements from Media Trust, Academy of Urbanism, Shared Assets, Street Games and more.



"Thank you for the excellent guidance. I can safely say that your input will have a major effect on the way we communicate, and is bound to raise our profile in the community."

Neil, East Coseley Big Local
 Media Trust worked with East Coseley Big Local to build on their communications skills and to develop a plan

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14. What, if anything, has been the biggest surprise about progress so far or the lack of it?

One surprise is that, whilst some areas have their ups and downs and tensions and disputes, at the present time all 149 out of 150 areas have partnerships that are functional and delivering. This is not to underestimate the commitment and capacity of people in the Big Local areas; rather, it is a recognition of the mammoth task it has been for volunteers to assess local needs, consult the community and to develop and start to implement their plan. This is particularly the case given that many areas lacked community capacity and confidence at the outset of the programme, and needed to be supported as they built their local partnerships.

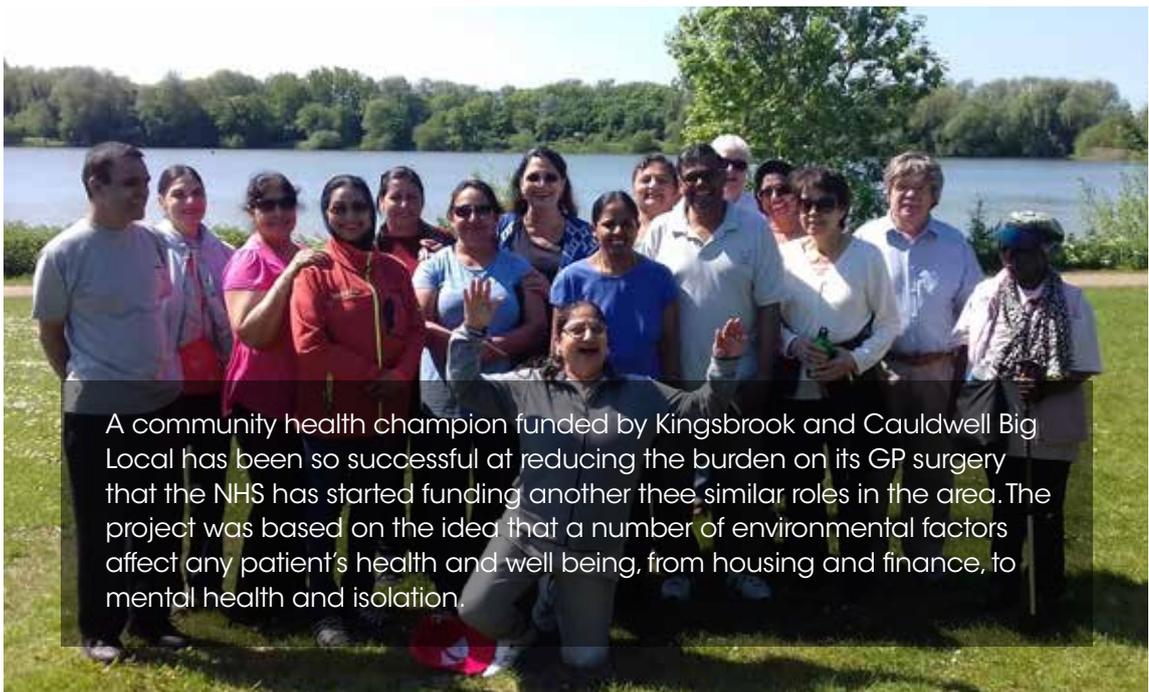
Another aspect that has caused surprise is the ambition that some partnerships have exhibited and the speed at which some areas have progressed to develop large and complicated projects.

W So quite early in the process people decided – let’s do a community land trust.”

This response challenges widespread perceptions of very disadvantaged areas focused on apathy, dependency and lack of capacity. People living in Big Local areas are diverse and have a range of resources, including skills, experience and initiative. In every Big Local area, people are coming together who are prepared to become involved, give time to tackling big issues, and develop significant new initiatives to improve their local neighbourhood.

What has been most striking is the number of people in every community who have engaged with the programme, the depth of their engagement, and the fact that when they get involved, they tend to stay involved. People in local partnerships are generally deeply committed, have a very strong emotional connection to the work and dedicate significant time to it:

W Partnership members have shown enormous dedication. They put in a huge amount of time on a voluntary basis. Often being involved means a huge amount of hassle, yet they tend to persevere and stay involved.



15. How fast do things get going?

The speed of progress between areas can vary considerably—one of the advantages of a programme with a 15-year lifespan is the extent to which it can accommodate this. What is clear is that the culture of a place, and the extent to which community activities were already underway within it, have been key determinants of the speed with which progress has been made.

Big Local areas where there were existing community groups, with little or no conflict between them, have been able to make faster progress than others. In communities

where there was little existing culture of civic involvement and Big Local had to be built from scratch, it has sometimes taken up to five years to get to the point where trust is established, priorities are agreed, decisions made and projects launched. But, arguably, these are some of the areas which most need the sort of investment and support provided by Local Trust and Big Local. In areas with pre-existing local organisations and infrastructure, progress can be faster, although this can be dependent on local players choosing to work effectively in partnership with one another rather than compete over access to funds.



Firs & Bromford Big Local premiered a spoof zombie movie exploring issues of regeneration and intergenerational identity for urban communities. Made in partnership with Birmingham City University and the Bromford theatre, this film is part of a series recording the history of the area. Designed to appeal to young people, the gory zombies represented the tensions different age groups in the community.

16. Are there other factors that seem to be critical to areas making a success of Big Local?

Places to meet and deliver projects seem a critical success factor. Where Big Locals have not had access to a community centre or other meeting place, they have often struggled to establish a presence or identity in an area. They have also lacked venues where the recipients of their smaller grant-funding could deliver activities and services. Indeed, access to this sort of space is so important for many communities—where it has sometimes largely disappeared in recent years because of local authority cuts—that in their plans they have prioritised access to or ownership of assets.

Some areas have found accessing community space relatively straightforward, particularly where they have built strong relationships with a supportive local authority. However, other Big Local areas have either struggled to gain access to any space, or have faced local authorities who seem more interested in extracting excessive rent for low-quality or under-used space than in supporting the development of sustainable, community-led activity.

These issues are explored in more depth in Dan Gregory's essay for Local Trust *Skittled Out?*



Social infrastructure is generally held in corporate, rather than community, ownership. Can the civic operating system evolve to meet modern social needs, and where does Big Local come in? Dan Gregory discusses in his essay.

17. Are we starting to see some impact from the investment and support provided to the areas? If so, what form does this impact take and what is the evidence for it?

It is hard to set any common metrics for Big Local areas. There is massive variation in the context and challenges across Big Local areas.

For example, for one Big Local, a village with an elderly population, end-of-life care may be the issue that is front-of-mind. Others have populations dominated by young families. Demographics and geography make a big difference. Some areas are very remote or cut off because of poor transport links; others may be quite centrally located in big cities but, nonetheless, residents may feel excluded from opportunities on their doorstep. In another example, Clapham Junction in London, where significant development is underway, private-sector investment dwarfs that available from the Big Local. The priorities and projects in each of these areas may be completely different.

Local Trust has also been careful not to establish any single set of performance metrics for the programme, to avoid over-influencing areas that might feel compelled to 'game' the system to provide evidence to the funder reflecting the Trust's priorities but not theirs.

What we have done is invest significantly in supporting Big Local areas to set their own impact frameworks and approaches to measuring change. And, seven years into the programme, across nearly all Big Local areas we can now see evidence of both significant change on the ground and genuine transformation in the confidence and capacity of residents involved in delivering the programme.



Widespread employment, pushed up by precarious jobs and zero hours contracts, has not improved overall economic wellbeing. In Hartlepool, Thurrock and Morecambe – places where economic growth is failing to have any visible benefits – Hazel Sheffield discovers the power of individuals partnering with communities to create change.

As a booming summer season comes to an end, the once neglected Stamford Park boating lake and Chadwick Dam is on its way to becoming a self-sufficient business. The lakes have long been considered a local treasure. In restoring them, a strong tradition has been revived.



It's easy to forget when you're caught up with the nuts and bolts of delivering the programme that this is about changing lives for the better. It's about the stories of individuals and their personal journeys.

The power of Big Local is its capacity to interest people and bring them together.

I would like our legacy to be more than just a building or a park. I would like it to be communities that are able to come together to tackle issues and to influence other local stakeholders. This depends on people sticking around and it depends on bringing young people on board.

I visited one area for an event and then went back eight months later for another. I noticed a dramatic change in the young people present. At the first event they weren't as involved... They were running the second event and showing the guests around. That's a significant change in a relatively short time span.

Zoe Sykiotis, Senior Programme Co-ordinator, Local Trust

Evaluation and learning approach

Local Trust's ambition is not simply to deliver a programme and learn from how it's going, but to shape and influence policy and practice through shared learning from the Big Local programme. The way we manage and evaluate Big Local is responsive and adaptive. Rather than using a theory of change, our action plan is flexible and embraces the non-prescriptive nature of the programme, working directly with people in Big Local areas to measure change. For this reason, we have an in-house research team and a network of external partners who use new and innovative methods to produce reports and evaluations, validating and supporting the value and uniqueness of Big Local. We believe Big Local is an experiment to test our hypothesis that:



Long term funding and support to build capacity gives residents in hyper-local areas agency to take decisions and to act to create positive and lasting change"

18. How are skills and capacity changing in Big Local areas?

Local Trust aspires to support areas to build their capacity and develop their skills. As noted, the impression gained is that Big Local partnerships are growing in their confidence and capacity. Generally, plans are more robust and more clearly communicate what the partnership is setting out to do. They are also more ambitious, which suggests greater confidence. Some partnerships are also starting to tackle some of the bigger and more intractable problems in their areas—for example, gangs.

Partnerships are also demonstrating greater skill in budgeting. Previously they might have spent 40 per cent of their planned expenditure. Typically, the figure is now up to 80 or 90 per cent.

One aspiration of Local Trust is that partnerships will positively influence other local stakeholders. We are interested in how local partnerships can influence local authorities and what real change can be achieved in a place, for example, in relation to economic development due to the leverage created by £1m under community control.

This issue is yet to be fully explored, but we can cite some examples of how Big Local areas are attempting to influence other local stakeholders in relation to disused land which is council-owned, or to the closure of a bus route or a GP's surgery. One very positive development is that local authorities are starting to consult partnerships about community needs and appropriate provision, recognising and respecting how much they know about their communities.

19. If we could go back in time to the start, or if the programme were to be repeated, what, if anything, could be done differently?

Reflecting on the start-up period of Local Trust from 2012 to 2014, some staff remark on how difficult it had been to launch and establish processes for a new funding and support programme, whilst at the same time setting up and putting in place the processes needed for a new organisation. To compound this, Big Local was announced before Local Trust was set up, meaning that the team felt they were always 'having to play catch-up'.

In the early years, there was also insufficient recognition of the need to invest in core capacity at the centre in order to ensure that local areas were provided with the level of support and engagement they needed. This was particularly the case in the set-up and early planning phases. And, as noted above, the focus on outsourcing critical aspects of programme-delivery, such as rep management, significantly affected Local Trust's ability to ensure the programme was effectively supported in its early days.

As a consequence, at certain stages in the life of the programme it is arguable that Local Trust has been seriously understaffed. This has created numerous difficulties, for example, with regard to the effective management of contracts for support-provision, or the maintenance of connection with Big Local areas. More resources might have been invested at the outset to ensure that the organisation had the capacity to do the job at hand. More recently, the central team at Local Trust has been significantly increased to ensure it is properly equipped to support delivery of the programme.



When Mel Hudson decided to set up and coach a football club in Slade Green, she had barely coached a game in her life. Her desire to set up Slade Green Knights was driven by recognition that there were no activities for young people in the area. Now, the club has over 150 footballers and are hoping to buy the land that once belonged to Slade Green FC.

Local Trust staff have expressed the view (shared by some Big Local areas) that the area boundaries determined at the start of the programme did not always make sense, and, where mistakes were made, they on occasion impacted significantly on local communities' ability to get going quickly. In one instance, for example, the Big Local area comprises two housing estates divided by a major road that people on the estates tend to avoid crossing. Another Big Local area is actually made up of two smaller distinct areas unconnected with one another, i.e. not one continuous piece of land. While some

of the areas already had a strong sense of identity, for example, mining villages or housing estates, others did not self-identify as a defined community and had to spend considerable time negotiating and agreeing on shared identities and interests before they could develop plans. Some have continued to face problems about the perceived fairness of funding allocated to areas, or about participation in partnership meetings. If areas had been selected with more of a focus on natural boundaries or existing, recognised identities, the programme would have faced fewer issues at the outset.

20. What issues have been identified that we will need to think about/respond to in the future?

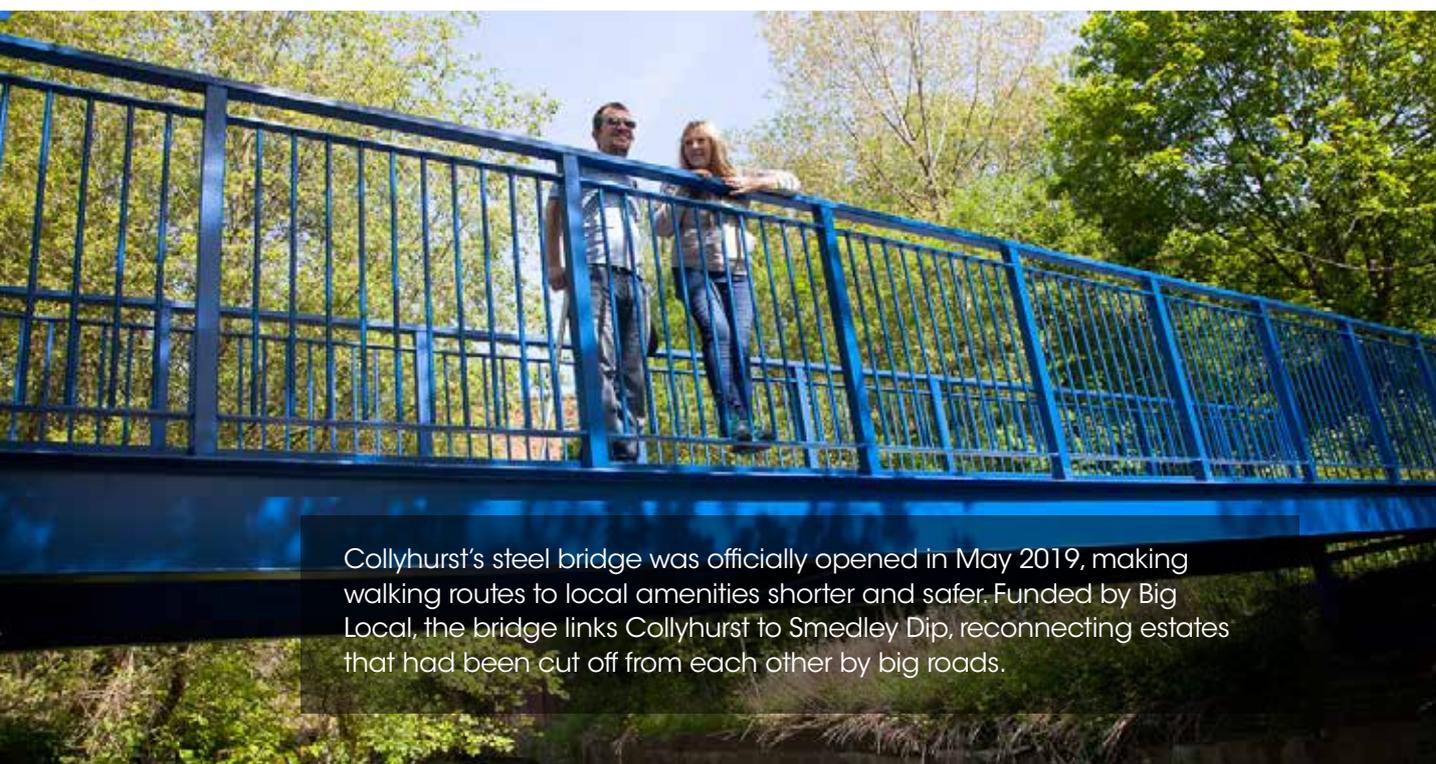
A number of issues for further consideration have emerged from Local Trust's discussions:

- How can our partnerships best work to influence the local public sector, given that our areas are hyper-local and that these bodies have a much larger geographical remit? Some Big Locals have great partnership relationships with their local authorities and other local statutory agencies, whilst others struggle to engage in any positive way. This is as much an issue of effective sharing of experience between Big Local areas as something that Local Trust can directly help with.
- The sustainability of LTOs is likely to emerge as an issue, given the context of reduced funding for infrastructure and support organisations. A small number of LTOs has already failed. It is not clear whether, if a programme of this sort was to be set up again, particularly if the number of areas was increased, there would necessarily be organisations willing to act as LTOs on the same terms.
- How can we best evidence the change that the programme is creating in the areas without burdening the partnerships with unnecessary bureaucracy? This may be relevant to conversations amongst funders about the extent to which conventional and simplistic impact-measurement is helpful when considering long-term systemic and cultural change.
- There has been low take-up of our social investment offer. There may be value in examining why there appears to be such a divergence between the priorities set by national policy-makers and influencers and the experience of local communities attempting to deliver change in areas where these sorts of models often appear much less relevant.
- Some areas have proved themselves to be good at setting up partnerships, making decisions and delivering and bringing in additional funding, while others have found it more difficult to make progress. We are planning to do further work examining the support needed by areas that appear to be struggling.
- Areas are reluctant to spend their precious funds on professional fees, but some are seeking to deliver large building or other complicated projects. Whilst there are sometimes pro-bono sources of high-quality professional services, we should also highlight the success of those areas that have chosen to commission expert support and have benefited from it.
- Big Local areas have until 2026 to spend their £1.1 million and determine their own legacy – that is to say, what remains after the money is spent. Local Trust has conducted research and provided learning and networking support to Big Local areas as they prepare for this. As they approach spend out, our support needs to shift towards the transition to legacy building.
- Civil society groups and the government's Civil Society Strategy point to the need for long-term strategic investment to promote strong relationships and social action across England. Knowledge from the Big Local programme should be captured and shared, so that it can be ploughed into long-term so that it can inform future programmes, such as the proposed Community Wealth Fund.

- In some areas, the partnership is setting up an incorporated organisation to purchase or hold an asset (such as a new community hub). We need to consider the relationship that these new incorporated organisations have with Local Trust and how they might contribute towards securing a legacy from the programme.
- Some areas are not making as much progress as others. The view is that these tend to be the areas in which partnership members lack confidence about what might be achieved, those that close themselves off, or in which conflict between individuals is not managed. We perhaps need to undertake further work to understand whether these areas have common characteristics and how they might best be supported to progress.
- Do we need to be more challenging of ourselves and our approach and its underlying principles? Should we be more challenging of areas, whilst avoiding any sense that we are moving away from the principle that it is local residents who are in control?



How are Big Local areas engaging with new and transient groups and communities? Researched in central urban, coastal and post-industrial places, this report explores how choices around values, approaches and structures can make a difference to successful engagement with transient groups, including recent immigrants, seasonal workers and traveller communities.



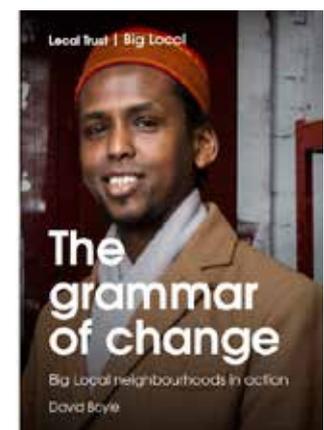
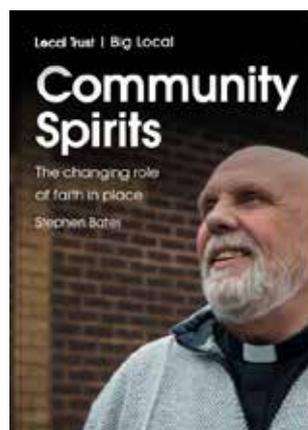
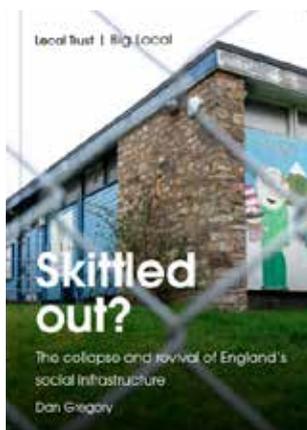
Collyhurst's steel bridge was officially opened in May 2019, making walking routes to local amenities shorter and safer. Funded by Big Local, the bridge links Collyhurst to Smedley Dip, reconnecting estates that had been cut off from each other by big roads.

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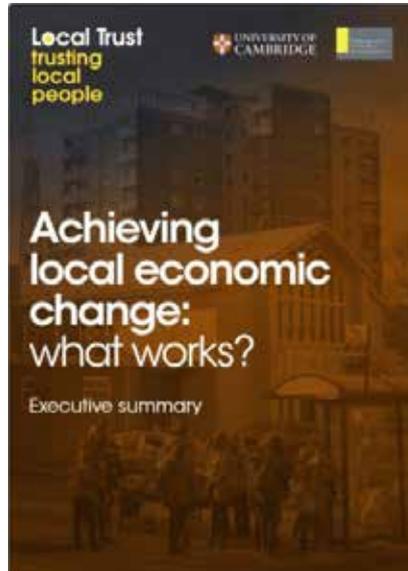
Essays

Read about how people and places are changing through Big Local in our essay series written by independent thinkers



Insights

Read our reports to see what has been learnt as we research and evaluate Big Local



The halfway point: Reflections on Big Local

Big Local is a National Lottery Community Fund-funded programme which commits £1m each to 150 neighbourhoods across England. The £217m originally provided by The National Lottery Community Fund to support this programme is the largest single-purpose Lottery-funded endowment ever made, and the biggest ever investment by a non-state funder in place-based, resident-led change.

In terms of scale, time horizon and ethos, nothing like Big Local has ever existed. Designed from the outset to be radically different from other funding programmes, at the heart of Big Local is a vision of empowered, resilient, dynamic, asset-rich communities making their own decisions on what is best for their area.

This publication marks several milestones. In 2019, the National Lottery celebrates its 25th birthday – 25 years of giving to good causes across the UK. In Big Local, the 150 areas have now crossed the halfway point in their 10–15-year spending plans, with many lessons learned along the way.

It is a perfect moment to share some of the valuable knowledge gained from these brilliant communities.

Local Trust

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