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# ENABLING COMMUNITIES TO DELIVER THEIR OWN FUTURES

A Big Society goal is to enable communities to deliver their own futures. We believe that if we can provide the tools, skills and resources required to deliver self-sustaining communities, then this goal is achievable and realistic.

By [John Brown](#) and [Suzanna Pembroke](#)

Our first consideration is: how can the inherent values of place be identified and used to empower communities to 'buy-in' to their local areas?

The inherent values of a place may be defined on two levels. Firstly, there are those values that have been identified by previous or existing communities, either through legislature (protection), use-association (tradition) or cultural references (commemoration). These may be considered 'expert' values, which require prior knowledge or education. Secondly, there are those values which are universally apparent, and may appeal to people on a basic level, with little or no prior knowledge required. Generally these values can be linked to sense-perceptions (awe, comfort, familiarity, beauty, disquiet).

Historic places and features play a major role in shaping identity. Communities that have a long history with a place understand, often at a taken-for-granted level, the role certain buildings, places and icons play in their concept of local identity. However ways of translating this sense of heritage to people who are migrants from other places has been more difficult. Conversely, both communities may relate to the non-expert values of a place, which may gain precedence in any community-led process.

Where 'new' communities have been entrenched in an area for some time, but have not had past values communicated to them, those values may be lost or unappreciated, or even viewed negatively.

In undertaking retrofit or place-making initiatives that

benefit the whole community, we need to be able to account for the presence of new groups, and also challenge our own assumptions about what is considered 'heritage' by existing groups. Groups such as BEN (Black Environment Network) recognise the role heritage plays in linking people with place.

It is important to define those assets within the landscape that have a cultural value of either an 'expert', or a 'universal' nature. The model we might adopt is that of Rapid Asset Assessment, based on using values defined by English Heritage's Conservation Principles for assessing significance. This baseline data survey then allows assets to be assessed spatially, relative to one another, and their value communicated.

Our second question is: who are the communities that 'hold a stake' in a place, and how can their appreciation of place-value enhance social capital?

In the United Kingdom, our local communities are composed of people with different ages, ethnicity, classes, health and social experience. The way in which these social factors are handled during regeneration and maintenance of the urban environment can lead to opportunities for better equality, better diversity of populations and inclusion of all, thus empowering vulnerable groups and improving the communities' wellbeing and resilience. Or they can destabilise communities by creating social barriers, false stereotypes and enforcing disempowerment of vulnerable groups. Assisting local communities to take ownership over these projects has been shown to go a long way towards