

Hartlepool Sport: Principles for Community-Owned Learning

Place Expansion Insight – December 2025



Hartlepool Place Expansion

Principles for Community-Owned Learning

**A Framework for Insight, Ownership, and
Asset-Based Community Development.**



 NotebookLM

Context:

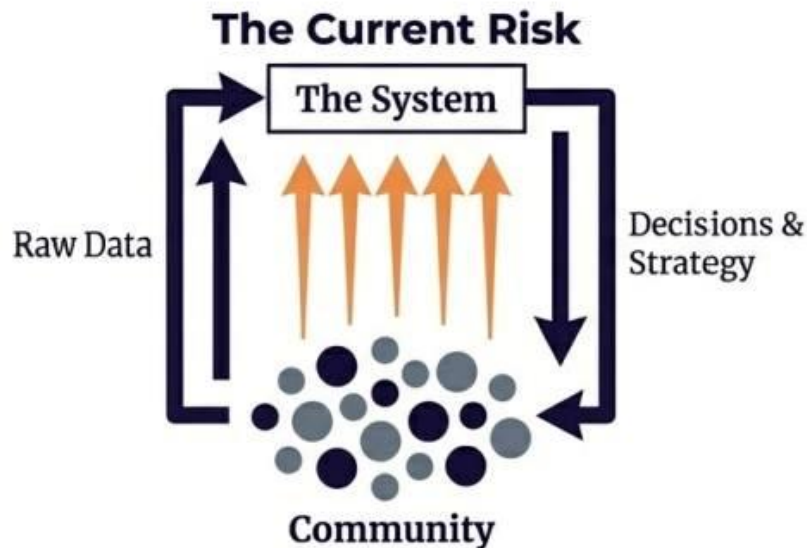
This document challenges models that extract data from communities but retain interpretation, learning, and decision-making elsewhere. It frames the issue not as methodological, but as a question of power, legitimacy, and authorship.

Key Insight: Lasting, legitimate change in place only occurs when learning and ownership sit first with the community, not solely with external systems.

The Central Question

“Does this way of working build pride, power, and possibility in Hartlepool — and leave the place stronger than before?”

The Core Problem: Data Extraction vs. Knowledge Ownership



- ⚠ • Treating communities as sources of data rather than owners of knowledge.
- ⚠ • Separating data collection from sense-making.
- ⚠ • Reinforcing external ownership of narratives and priorities.
- ⚠ • Undermining confidence, trust, and long-term sustainability.

“In Hartlepool, these risks are amplified where insight questions are generated externally... and learning flows upward, while decisions flow back down.”

The Trap of AI-Generated Insight

Why ChatGPT cannot define what matters in a Place.

1. It is Deficit-Led

AI defaults to 'What's missing?' or 'What barriers exist?' This positions communities as problems to be fixed rather than places rich in capability.

2. It Flattens Context

AI provides context-agnostic outputs that treat places as interchangeable, missing hyper-local history and informal leadership.

3. It Privileges Institutional Knowledge

Questions designed by systems favour confident speakers and those fluent in 'sport system' language, missing the hidden connectors.

ChatGPT can support systems. ABCD strengthens communities.

Ownership Remains Elsewhere



When no one on the governance group lives in Hartlepool, the group unintentionally becomes the ‘author’ of the place narrative, reducing residents to mere contributors.

Who Is Actually Learning?

If communities gather the insight but do not analyse or interpret it, who is actually learning?

The System Gains

- ⚙️ Strategic understanding
- 📄 Narrative control
- 🛡️ Confidence
- 📌 Legitimacy.



The Community Gains

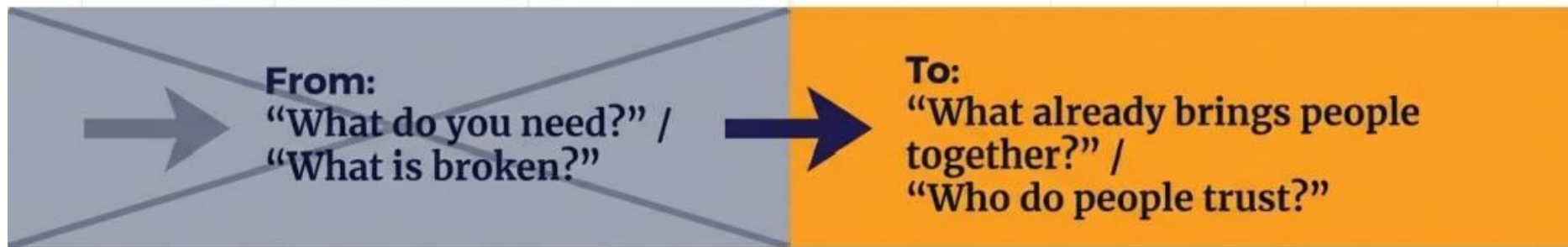
- 📋 Tasks
- 🕒 Deadlines
- 💬 Requirement to adapt language.

→ **Result:** This reinforces the perception that Hartlepool provides insight **but does not own knowledge.**

Shift Required: From 'Community -> Data -> Steering Group -> Decisions'
TO 'Community -> Insight -> Local Sense-Making -> Shared Stewardship'

The Alternative: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

An approach that focuses on identifying, mobilizing, and strengthening existing assets rather than concentrating on deficiencies.



New Tools



Asset Walks



Story Circles



Peer-led
Conversations

Strategic Goal: Redefining insight as the discovery of strengths and connections, ensuring the process builds power, not dependency.

Principles for Community-Owned Learning (1–6)

1 Learning Sits Where Lived Experience Sits: Those closest to the experience hold primary authority to interpret meaning.

2 Communities Are Analysts, Not Just Data Collectors: Allocating resource for local interpretation sessions before system-level analysis.

3 Insight Remains Local Before It Travels: No external synthesis without prior local sense-checking.

4 Assets Are the Starting Point: Shift from “What’s needed?” to “What’s strong here?”

5 Interpretation Is a Collective Act: Analysis must be co-created with those who gathered the insight.

6 Power and Learning Are Explicitly Acknowledged: Participants must clearly see how their insight influences decisions.

Principles for Community-Owned Learning (7–12)

7 **Steering Groups Steward Conditions, Not Meaning**
Their role is to enable, protect, and remove barriers, not define success in isolation.

8 **Language Belongs to the Community First**
Do not correct local language to fit strategy; adapt strategy to fit place.

9 **Learning Builds Capacity, Not Dependency**
Every activity should leave communities more confident and connected.

10 **Feedback Loops Are Non-Negotiable**
Close the loop publicly and locally.

11 **Pride Is an Outcome of Ownership**
Pride grows when people see their knowledge shaping action.

12 **ABCD Is the Default, Not the Exception**
Asset-based learning is the standard operating approach.

Mapping Consultation Theatre vs. Co-Design & Power-Sharing

Consultation Theatre

Strategic Intent

'Work with' means engagement after decisions. Community insight optimizes programs.

Place Expansion

'Locally led' = local delivery of national priorities.

Co-Design

Strategic Intent

'Work with' means shared authorship. Communities shape what activity IS.

Place Expansion

'Locally led' = local people involved before priorities are defined. Systems adapt to place.

Consultation delivers projects in place. Co-design reshapes the system with place.

Measuring What Matters

Consultation Theatre

Inequalities & Lived Experience

People asked to describe problems; emotional labour without authority.

Measurement & Outcomes

Measures participation numbers and sessions delivered.

Co-Design

Inequalities & Lived Experience

Lived experience recognized as decision-making expertise; insight leads to power shifts.

Measurement & Outcomes

Measures confidence, agency, social ties, and local leadership emergence.

Consultation Theatre helps us do things better. Co-design and power-sharing help us do different things — and that's where system change lives.

The Red Flag Checklist

Is this insight activity **Community-Owned** or **System-Led**?



- You didn't help shape the questions.



- You're asked to collect data, not interpret it.



- Raw data must be handed over immediately.



- Assets are secondary to problems (focus on barriers/gaps).



- Interpretation happens in rooms you're not in.



- Language changes as insight moves upwards.



- You don't see the learning come back.



- The process feels like compliance.

What Good Looks Like

A Community-Owned Learning Checklist

- ✓ 'These **questions sound like us.**' (Communities shape questions).
- ✓ 'We are **expected to make sense of this,** not just **gather it.**' (Learning is built in).
- ✓ 'This process helps us **see what's already strong here.**' (Assets lead).
- ✓ '**Meaning is being shaped by people who live this every day.**' (Local interpretation).
- ✓ 'Our **words** haven't **been edited out.**' (Language stays local).
- ✓ 'This made us feel like **authors of our place,** not subjects of a programme.' (Pride is a by-product).

Scoring the Red Flags from previous slide:

0–2: Largely community-owned.

3–5: Mixed model — clarify roles urgently.

6+: Extractive — pause and reset.

Strategic Value of Community Ownership



Builds Capability

Increases local confidence and leadership.



Strengthens Legitimacy

Builds trust between systems and communities.



Avoids Waste

Prevents duplication and loss of locally generated insight.



Ensures Sustainability

Leaves Hartlepool stronger regardless of funding cycles.

Diplomatic Note: This document does not replace governance; it acts as a shared alignment tool to make power visible and protect community authorship.

The Final Challenge

If communities do the work but the system does the learning, whose capacity is really being built?

ChatGPT can support systems. ABCD strengthens communities. If Pride in Place is the goal, learning must belong to the place first.

Hartlepool Place Expansion: Principles for Community-Owned Learning

Executive Summary

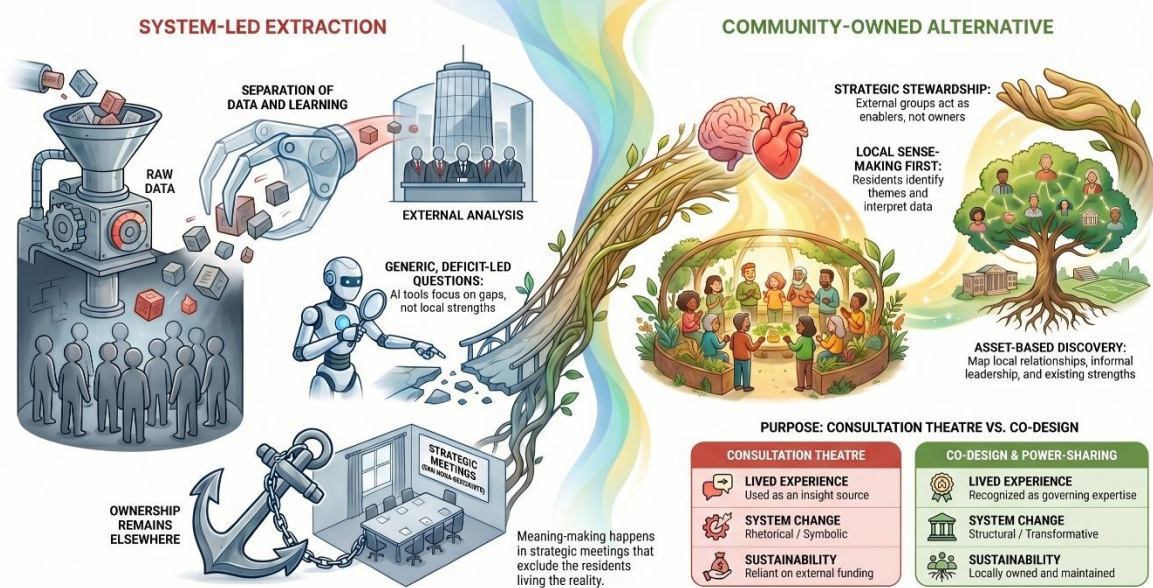
This briefing document outlines a values-led framework for insight, learning, and decision-making within the Hartlepool Place Expansion programme. It argues that legitimate, sustainable change occurs only when learning and ownership reside primarily with the community rather than external systems, steering groups, or analytical tools.

The current model faces significant risks by treating communities as data sources rather than knowledge owners. This "extractive" approach separates data collection from sense-making, reinforces external narratives, and undermines local trust. To counteract this, the framework advocates for an **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)** approach and aligns with the national **Pride in Place** agenda.

Critical Takeaways:

- **Shift in Authorship:** Communities must move from being "research assistants" to becoming co-analysts and co-authors of their own narratives.
- **Process over Methodology:** The focus should shift from "asking better questions" to establishing better processes that prioritize local relationships and strengths.
- **Role of Strategic Partners:** Steering groups and strategic partners should act as stewards of conditions and enablers of community-led learning, rather than owners of meaning or sole decision-makers.
- **The Ethical Challenge:** Partners are challenged to ensure their methods build "pride, power, and possibility," leaving Hartlepool stronger regardless of funding cycles.

Empowering Hartlepool: Moving from Data Extraction to Community Ownership



The Core Problem: Extractive vs. Community-Owned Insight

The document identifies a fundamental tension in how insight is currently gathered and processed. When insight is designed and interpreted by those outside the community, ownership of both the story and the solutions inevitably shifts away from the place.

The Displacement of Learning

In the current model, community organizations collect neighborhood data and submit it to a Strategic Steering Group (overseen by Active Hartlepool, Hartlepool Community Trust, and Tees Valley Sport) for analysis. This creates a hierarchy where:

- **The System Learns:** Strategic groups build system-level understanding and strategic narratives.
- **The Community Complies:** Local organizations deliver tasks and adapt their language to fit funding expectations, remaining dependent on external resources.

Risks of the Current Model

- **Treatment of Data:** Communities are used as sources of raw data while interpretation and decision-making happen elsewhere.
- **Separation of Sense-Making:** Learning occurs during the debate and interpretation of data; by removing this phase from the community, the system captures the intellectual asset of learning for itself.
- **Survival Behavior:** Residents may say what the system wants to hear or perform "need" to attract resources, which is a transactional survival behavior rather than genuine insight.

Challenging External Tools and Governance

The Limitations of AI (ChatGPT) in Place Expansion

While efficient, using AI to generate insight questions is explicitly challenged for several reasons:

- **Deficit-Led Bias:** AI tends to focus on barriers and what is "missing," positioning communities as problems to be fixed.
- **Context Flattening:** AI produces generic outputs that miss cultural nuances, hyper-local history, and informal leadership.
- **Transactional Framing:** AI reinforces a model where residents are "respondents" rather than "co-creators."

The "Double Displacement" of External Governance

Ownership is further eroded when steering groups consist of members who do not live in Hartlepool. This creates a "double abstraction":

1. **Insight is abstracted** from lived reality through pattern-based logic (AI/External professionals).

2. **Decisions are abstracted** from local accountability.

Strategic groups that do not live in the place risk becoming "proxy owners" and arbiters of what counts as success, rather than guardians of local conditions.

Principles for Community-Owned Learning and Insight

The framework provides twelve core principles to ensure alignment with ABCD and Pride in Place:

#	Principle	Description
1	Lived Experience Authority	Insight and learning must be rooted in the communities where they are generated.
2	Communities as Analysts	Local organizations are co-authors of insight, not just data collectors.
3	Local First	Raw data and early learning must stay in the community for validation before moving to strategic spaces.
4	Assets as the Starting Point	Processes must begin with "What's strong here?" rather than "What's needed?"
5	Collective Interpretation	Sense-making should happen in inclusive settings like story circles or asset mapping workshops.
6	Transparency of Power	Who learns, decides, and benefits must be clear at every stage.
7	Stewardship vs. Ownership	Steering groups exist to remove barriers, not to define success in isolation.
8	Local Language	Local words should not be corrected to fit strategy; strategy should adapt to the place.
9	Capacity Building	Every activity should leave the community more confident and connected.
10	Non-Negotiable Feedback	Communities must see how their learning influenced final decisions.
11	Pride as an Outcome	Pride grows when local knowledge is seen shaping action.
12	ABCD as Default	Asset-based learning is the standard operating approach, not a pilot.

Mapping Consultation Theatre vs. Co-Design

To assist partners in evaluating their approach, the document maps common practices against Sport England's "Uniting the Movement" strategy and outcomes.

Area	Consultation Theatre (Weak Fit)	Co-Design & Power-Sharing (Strong Fit)
Locally Led	Local delivery of national priorities.	Local decision-making and authorship.
Lived Experience	Gathered through surveys/case studies as "data."	Recognized as decision-making expertise.
Asset-Based	Assets mapped, then bypassed for funded provision.	Assets mobilized; investment strengthens networks.
System Change	Rhetorical; organizations retain control to manage risk.	Structural; institutions accept uncertainty and shared risk.
Measurement	Participation numbers and sessions delivered.	Confidence, agency, and strength of social ties.
Sustainability	Participation drops when funding ends.	Activity continues because it belongs locally.

Red Flag Checklist: System-Led vs. Community-Owned

A "Red Flag Checklist" is provided to help community organizations and steering groups identify extractive processes.

Key Red Flags:

- You didn't help shape the questions.
- You are asked to collect data, but not interpret it.
- Raw data must be handed over immediately with no local reflection time.
- Interpretation happens in rooms you are not invited to attend.
- Local language is replaced by system/funding terminology.
- There is no clear feedback on how insight influenced decisions.
- **Result:** 6+ red flags indicate an extractive process that requires a pause and reset.

Defining Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

The document is grounded in the ABCD approach, which shifts focus from community deficiencies to community strengths.

Core Categories of Assets:

1. **Individual:** Skills, talents, and experiences of residents.
2. **Associational:** Community groups, clubs, and faith-based organizations.
3. **Institutional:** Schools, libraries, and local government.
4. **Physical:** Land, buildings, and infrastructure.

5. **Economic:** Local businesses and informal economies.

The ABCD Process: The methodology involves mapping assets, building relationships, and mobilizing those assets toward shared goals. External partners are engaged only to support initiatives that are already locally driven.

Conclusion

The fundamental challenge posed to all partners in the Hartlepool Place Expansion is: **"If communities do the work, but the system does the learning, whose capacity is really being built?"**

For Pride in Place to be realized, the system must shift from a model of outsourced extraction to one of shared stewardship, where the community owns the questions, the stories, and the decisions.