



Hartlepool Place Expansion Principles for Community-owned Learning

V4

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Executive Summary

This document sets out a clear, values-led framework for how insight, learning, and decision-making should operate within **Hartlepool Place Expansion**, ensuring alignment with **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)** and the national **Pride in Place** agenda.

At its core, the paper argues that **lasting, legitimate change in place only occurs when learning and ownership sit first with the community**, not solely with external systems, steering groups, or analytical processes. While insight gathering is widely promoted across Place Expansion, this document challenges models that extract data from communities but retain interpretation, learning, and decision-making elsewhere.

The Core Problem Identified

Current approaches risk:

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

In Hartlepool, these risks are amplified where:

- Insight questions are generated externally (including via AI tools)
- Steering or governance groups do not live in the place
- Community organisations gather insight but do not analyse or interpret it
- Learning flows upward, while decisions flow back down

The document reframes this not as a technical or methodological issue, but as a **question of power, legitimacy, and authorship**.

The ABCD-Led Alternative

Rather than focusing on “better questions”, the paper calls for **better processes**, grounded in ABCD principles:

- Start with **assets, strengths, relationships, and informal activity**
- Treat learning itself as a **community asset**
- Keep insight and early interpretation **local before it travels**
- Position communities as **analysts and co-authors**, not research assistants
- Ensure strategic partners act as **stewards of conditions**, not owners of meaning

AI tools (such as ChatGPT) are explicitly positioned as **supportive, limited tools**—useful only after community-led learning has begun, and never as the starting point for defining what matters.

What the Document Provides

To support practical application, the paper includes:

- **Clear principles for community-owned learning**
- A mapping of **consultation theatre vs genuine co-design and power-sharing**, explicitly aligned to Sport England language and outcomes
- A **Red Flag Checklist** to identify extractive or system-led insight processes
- A **“What Good Looks Like” checklist** describing healthy, pride-building learning models
- Guidance to help partners test whether their approaches build **pride, power, and possibility**, or simply system knowledge

Strategic Value

Used well, this framework helps ensure that Place Expansion:

- Builds **local confidence, leadership, and capability**
- Strengthens **trust and legitimacy** between systems and communities
- Avoids duplication and loss of locally generated insight
- Leaves Hartlepool **stronger, more connected, and more confident**, regardless of funding cycles

The document does not seek to replace governance or strategy. Instead, it acts as a **shared alignment tool**—making power and ownership visible, protecting community authorship, and supporting coherent, place-led system change.

Central Question

The executive challenge posed to all partners is simple but fundamental:

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



Foreword (Hartlepool Sport)

Hartlepool Sport was established with a clear purpose: to support a locally owned, asset-based approach to sport, physical activity, and movement in Hartlepool.

In shaping the organisation, Hartlepool Sport drew directly on learning from **all known Sport England Local Delivery Pilots (LDPs)** — the national precursors to the current Place Expansion programme. These pilots consistently demonstrated that sustainable change happens when communities are trusted as leaders of insight, not simply sources of data, and when systems adapt to place rather than the other way around.

This document reflects that learning. It brings together ABCD principles, Pride in Place ambitions, and practical experience from Hartlepool to support a way of working where insight, learning, and ownership sit as close as possible to lived experience.

It is offered in a spirit of collaboration — to help partners, community organisations, and strategic groups align around approaches that strengthen confidence, capability, and pride in Hartlepool.

Introductory Preamble

Hartlepool Place Expansion is rooted in a simple but vital belief: **lasting change in place happens when learning, insight, and ownership sit with the community first.**

As Hartlepool Board rolls out the national **Pride in Place** agenda, there is a shared expectation that programmes do more than deliver activity or generate evidence. They must build confidence, capability, and local authorship.

This means moving away from extractive models where communities are asked to provide data for others to analyse, and towards **asset-based, community-owned learning**, where residents and local organisations help define the questions, interpret the meaning, and shape what happens next.

The principles and checklists that follow are not about blame or compliance. They exist to:

- Protect local ownership of learning
- Clarify roles between communities and strategic partners
- Ensure Place Expansion strengthens Hartlepool, not just informs the system

Used together, they provide a shared reference point for everyone involved — community organisations, delivery partners, and steering groups — to ask a simple but powerful question:

Does this process build pride, power, and possibility in Hartlepool — or does ownership still sit elsewhere?

Challenging the Use of ChatGPT Questions for Place Expansion Insight

Using ChatGPT to generate questions for community insight can feel efficient and neutral, but for **Sport England Place Expansion**, this approach risks undermining the very principles required to create lasting, locally owned change.

1. AI-Generated Questions Tend to Be Deficit-Led

Even when well-intentioned, ChatGPT questions often default to:

- *What's missing?*
- *What's not working?*
- *What barriers exist?*

This framing subtly positions communities as **problems to be fixed**, rather than places rich in capability, relationships, and informal activity. In contrast, **ABCD starts with strengths**, not gaps.

Place Expansion aims to unlock potential — not diagnose failure.

2. Generic Questions Flatten Place and Context

ChatGPT produces **context-agnostic outputs**. This risks:

- Treating places as interchangeable
- Missing cultural nuance, informal leadership, and hyper-local history
- Reinforcing national system priorities over lived experience

ABCD insists that **place is specific**:

- Assets are embedded in local stories
 - Trust is relational, not extractive
 - Insight emerges through participation, not interrogation
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3. Question-Based Insight Privileges Institutional Knowledge

Formal questions — especially those designed externally — tend to favour:

- Confident speakers
- Established organisations
- Those already fluent in “sport system” language

ABCD deliberately shifts power by:

- Surfacing **hidden connectors** (parents, caretakers, shop owners, youth leaders)
- Valuing informal sport and movement
- Recognising activity that communities already define as meaningful

AI cannot identify these assets — **only people in place can.**

4. Insight Gathering Is Not Neutral — It Shapes Outcomes

The act of asking questions:

- Signals what matters
- Sets expectations about who holds expertise
- Frames the role of residents (respondents vs co-creators)

ABCD reframes insight as:

- **Asset mapping**, not needs assessment
- **Conversations**, not consultations
- **Invitation**, not extraction

ChatGPT questions risk reinforcing a *transactional* model where communities give insight, but ownership remains elsewhere.

An ABCD-Led Alternative for Place Expansion

Rather than asking *better questions*, Place Expansion should focus on **better processes**:

Replace “What do you need?” with:

- “What already brings people together here?”
- “Where does movement already happen — formally or informally?”
- “Who do people trust when something new is happening?”

Replace surveys with:

- Asset walks
- Story circles
- Peer-led conversations
- Community-hosted mapping sessions

Redefine insight as:

- **Discovery of strengths**
 - **Revealing connections**
 - **Building confidence to act**
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Where ChatGPT *Can* Play a Limited Role

ChatGPT may be useful **after** ABCD work has begun, for example:

- Helping practitioners reflect on themes emerging from community-led conversations
- Supporting learning synthesis *without replacing local voice*
- Drafting reflective prompts for practitioners — not residents

But it should never be the starting point.

Bottom Line

For Sport England Place Expansion, the key question is not:

“Are the questions good enough?”

But:

“Who defines what matters, and who owns what happens next?”

An **Asset-Based Community Development approach** ensures that insight gathering:

- Builds power, not dependency
- Reveals abundance, not absence
- Leaves places stronger — regardless of funding outcomes

ChatGPT can support systems.

ABCD strengthens communities.

“Ownership Remains Elsewhere”: Why This Matters in Hartlepool

When insight gathering is designed, framed, and interpreted by people who do not live in Hartlepool, ownership of both the *story* and the *solutions* inevitably sits elsewhere — regardless of good intent.

This is not a question of commitment or competence.
It is a question of **power, proximity, and legitimacy**.

1. Distance Shapes What Is Seen — and What Is Missed

Living outside the place means Steering Group members experience Hartlepool:

- Episodically (meetings, visits, data)
- Strategically (outcomes, frameworks, funding logic)
- Retrospectively (reports, dashboards, insight summaries)

Residents experience Hartlepool:

- Daily and relationally
- Through informal networks, routines, and micro-decisions
- In ways that never make it into formal “insight”

When questions are generated externally — whether by ChatGPT or by out-of-town professionals — they reflect the **worldview of those who leave at the end of the day**.

Ownership follows lived experience.

Those who live with the consequences should shape the questions.

2. AI Questions + External Governance = Double Displacement

In Hartlepool’s case, the risk is compounded:

- **ChatGPT** displaces local sense-making with generic, pattern-based logic
- **An external Steering Group** displaces local authority over interpretation and decision-making

This creates a *double abstraction*:

1. Insight is abstracted from lived reality
2. Decisions are abstracted from accountability to place

Even if residents contribute insight, **meaning-making happens elsewhere** — in meetings, documents, and funding decisions they do not attend.

3. Insight Without Local Ownership Breeds Compliance, Not Commitment

When people sense that:

- Questions were designed elsewhere
- Priorities were already set
- Decisions will be made by people who don't live locally

They adapt their responses accordingly.

This often leads to:

- Saying what the system wants to hear
- Framing activity to fit funding language
- Performing “need” to attract resource

That is not insight — it is **survival behaviour**.

ABCD warns explicitly against this: when ownership sits outside the community, participation becomes transactional, not transformational.

4. Steering Groups That Don't Live Locally Risk Becoming “Proxy Owners”

Strategic Steering Groups are meant to:

- Enable
- Protect
- Remove barriers

But when no one on the group lives in Hartlepool, the group can unintentionally become:

- The *author* of the place narrative
- The *arbiter* of what counts as success
- The *gatekeeper* of legitimacy

This creates a subtle but powerful shift:

- Residents become contributors
- The system becomes the owner

You cannot steward what you do not belong to.

5. ABCD Reframes Ownership as Practice, Not Position

Asset-Based Community Development offers a direct counterbalance:

Ownership is created when:

- Residents define what “active” means in Hartlepool
- Local connectors host conversations, not attend consultations
- Stories stay in the community before they travel upwards
- Decisions are made as close as possible to lived experience

For a Steering Group living outside the place, this means:

- Holding power lightly
- Designing for *local authorship*
- Accepting uncertainty and slower progress
- Being accountable to narratives they did not write

6. Practical Implications for Hartlepool Place Expansion

If ownership is to genuinely sit *in Hartlepool*, not around it:

- **Insight questions should be generated locally**, even if imperfect
- **Asset mapping should be facilitated by residents**, not commissioned
- **Interpretation sessions should happen in the town**, with community members present
- **Steering Group role should shift** from decision-maker to guardian of conditions

ChatGPT might summarise themes — but **never decide what matters**.

The Core Tension (and Opportunity)

Hartlepool Place Expansion sits at a crossroads:

- One path leads to *well-managed external ownership*, delivered efficiently
- The other leads to *messy local ownership*, built slowly but enduring

ABCD is clear: only the second path leads to sustainable change.

If Hartlepool is expected to own its future relationship with movement and activity, then Hartlepool must also own the questions, the stories, and the decisions.

“Who Is Actually Learning?” — A Critical Question for the Current Model

The current Place Expansion model in Hartlepool requires community organisations to:

1. Conduct insight gathering in their neighbourhoods
2. Submit raw data (notes, surveys, transcripts, outputs)
3. Hand this data to a **Strategic Steering Group** — overseen by Active Hartlepool, Hartlepool Community Trust, and Tees Valley Sport — for analysis, interpretation, and decision-making

This structure raises a fundamental issue that goes beyond process:

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

1. Learning Has Been Separated from Lived Experience

Learning does not happen at the point of data collection alone.

It happens when people:

- Make sense of patterns
- Debate meaning
- Challenge assumptions
- Decide what matters

In the current model:

- Community organisations **collect information**
- The Steering Group **does the learning**

This creates a hierarchy where:

- Communities act as *research assistants*
- The system retains *intellectual ownership*

That is not co-production — it is **outsourced extraction**.

2. ABCD Makes Learning a Community Asset

From an **Asset-Based Community Development** perspective, learning itself is an asset.

When insight is analysed locally:

- Confidence grows

- Leadership emerges
- Communities see their own complexity and strengths
- Pride and agency are reinforced

By removing interpretation from those closest to the data, the current model:

- Weakens local capacity
- Prevents feedback loops
- Reduces insight gathering to a transactional task

The question becomes not *what did we learn about Hartlepool?*
But *what did the system learn about Hartlepool?*

3. Insight Without Local Sense-Making Reinforces External Ownership

As discussed earlier, ownership follows:

- Question design
- Interpretation
- Decision-making

Under the current model:

- Questions are often system-shaped
- Data flows upward
- Meaning flows downward

Community organisations rarely see:

- How their insight influenced priorities
- Why certain narratives were amplified and others lost
- How context and nuance were handled

This reinforces the perception that:

Hartlepool provides insight, but does not own knowledge.

4. The Steering Group Learns — Communities Comply

The Steering Group:

- Learns about trends

- Builds system-level understanding
- Develops strategic narratives
- Gains confidence and legitimacy

Meanwhile, community organisations:

- Deliver tasks
- Meet deadlines
- Adapt language to fit expectations
- Remain dependent on future funding

This is a **learning imbalance** — and it directly contradicts:

- Pride in Place
- ABCD principles
- The stated ambition of Place Expansion to build local capacity

5. This Model Undermines Trust and Curiosity

When people gather insight but never interpret it:

- Curiosity declines
- Engagement becomes performative
- Trust erodes over time

Communities begin to ask:

- *Why are we doing this?*
- *Who benefits from this learning?*
- *What happens if our insight challenges system priorities?*

These are not signs of resistance — they are signs of **disempowerment**.

6. A Reframe: Learning as a Shared, Local Practice

If Hartlepool is serious about Pride in Place and ABCD, the model must change:

Instead of:

- Community → data → Steering Group → decisions

Move to:



- Community → insight → **local sense-making** → shared interpretation → stewardship decisions

This means:

- Community organisations hosting interpretation sessions
- Residents identifying themes and assets
- The Steering Group acting as **listeners and enablers**, not owners of meaning
- System partners learning *with* Hartlepool, not *about* it

7. The Core Question for the System

The most important question is not methodological — it is ethical:

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

Until learning sits with those who live and work in Hartlepool every day,
ownership will continue to sit elsewhere — no matter how inclusive the language.

Closing Position

Hartlepool Sport's ABCD approach offers a direct correction:

- Learning is local
- Interpretation is shared
- Knowledge is owned by the community first

That is not a threat to governance.

It is a fulfilment of Pride in Place.

Principles for Community-Owned Learning and Insight

These principles set out how learning, insight, and decision-making should operate within Hartlepool Place Expansion to ensure alignment with **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)** and the **Pride in Place** agenda.

1. Learning Sits Where Lived Experience Sits

Insight gathering, sense-making, and learning must be rooted in the communities where the insight is generated. Those closest to the lived experience hold primary authority to interpret meaning.

Test: Are residents and community organisations the first to identify themes and assets?

2. Communities Are Analysts, Not Just Data Collectors

Community organisations are not research assistants. They are co-analysts and co-authors of insight, with time, space, and permission to interpret what they hear.

Practice: Allocate resource for local interpretation sessions before any system-level analysis occurs.

3. Insight Remains Local Before It Travels

Raw data and early learning stay in the community first. Only community-validated insights move into strategic spaces.

Guardrail: No external synthesis without prior local sense-checking.

4. Assets Are the Starting Point, Not the Afterthought

All learning processes begin by identifying strengths, relationships, informal activity, and local leadership — not deficits or gaps.

In Hartlepool, this principle has already been demonstrated in practice. **Hartlepool Sport completed system mapping of local clubs, community groups, and providers at the outset**, creating a shared picture of existing assets and connections. This insight was made **open-source and available across the system**, explicitly to support collective learning and better decision-making.

However, the recent **Hartlepool Indoor Facilities Strategy** did not meaningfully draw on this asset mapping. This illustrates a recurring risk: when asset-based insight is generated locally but not used strategically, learning — and ownership — is displaced.

Question Shift: “What’s strong here?” before “What’s needed?”

Diplomatic note: This principle is not intended as a critique of individual strategies or partners. It highlights the importance of **system coherence** — ensuring that existing, locally generated asset-based insight is routinely reviewed and consciously integrated into future planning processes. Doing so strengthens alignment with Pride in Place, avoids duplication, and honours the learning already held within Hartlepool.

5. Interpretation Is a Collective Act

Learning is social. Interpretation should happen in facilitated, inclusive settings where multiple perspectives shape understanding.

Recent practice in Hartlepool highlights why this principle matters. The Strategic Steering Group has **presented its analysis of insight gathered back to the community research organisations**, without those organisations having been involved in the interpretation or sense-making process.

While well intentioned, this approach reinforces a separation between data collection and learning, and risks positioning communities as recipients of conclusions rather than co-authors of meaning.

Good practice requires that analysis is *co-created* with those who gathered the insight, before themes are formalised or shared.

Method: Story circles, asset mapping workshops, peer-led reflection.

6. Power and Learning Are Explicitly Acknowledged

Who learns, who decides, and who benefits must be transparent at every stage.

Check: Can participants clearly explain how their insight influences decisions?

7. Steering Groups Steward Conditions, Not Meaning

Strategic groups exist to enable, protect, and remove barriers — not to own narratives or define success in isolation.

Role Clarity: Listen, resource, and legitimise community-owned learning.

8. Language Belongs to the Community First

Insights are expressed initially in the language of the place. Translation into system or funding language happens later — without dilution.

Principle: Do not correct local language to fit strategy; adapt strategy to fit place.

9. Learning Builds Capacity, Not Dependency

Every insight activity should leave communities more confident, connected, and capable than before.

Measure: What new skills, relationships, or leadership emerged through learning?

10. Feedback Loops Are Non-Negotiable

Communities must see how their learning is used, challenged, or changed over time.

Commitment: Close the loop publicly and locally.

11. Pride Is an Outcome of Ownership

Pride in Place grows when people see their knowledge shaping action.

Outcome: Increased confidence to lead, not just participate.

12. ABCD Is the Default, Not the Exception

Asset-based learning is the standard operating approach — not a pilot or add-on.

Expectation: All partners align practice to these principles.

Mapping Consultation Theatre vs Co-Design & Power-Sharing

Against Sport England Language & Outcomes Frameworks

This mapping draws explicitly on:

- **Sport England's Uniting the Movement strategy**
 - **Place Expansion principles**
 - **System change, long-term conditions, and lived experience language**
 - **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framing**
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1. Strategic Intent: "Uniting the Movement"

Sport England Intent

"We will work with people, communities and partners to build a movement that gets everyone active, in ways that work for them."

Consultation Theatre Alignment (Weak Fit)

- "Work with" interpreted as **engagement after decisions**
- "Ways that work for them" translated into **tailoring delivery**
- Community insight used to optimise programmes, not question them
- Movement remains **institution-led**

Co-Design & Power-Sharing Alignment (Strong Fit)

- "Work with" understood as **shared authorship**
- Communities shape *what* activity is, not just *how* it's delivered
- Movement emerges from local energy, culture, and networks
- Institutions act as **enablers and backers**, not directors

Outcome difference:

Consultation improves uptake.

Co-design grows ownership and momentum.

2. Place Expansion: "Locally Led, Long-Term Change"

Sport England Place Expansion Language

- *Locally led*
- *Long-term systems change*

- *Working differently in place*
- *Responding to local context*

Consultation Theatre in Place

- “Locally led” = local delivery of national priorities
- Short-term pilots framed as experimentation
- Community consulted on barriers, not direction
- System remains largely unchanged

Co-Design & Power-Sharing in Place

- Local people involved before priorities are defined
- Decisions made closest to lived experience
- Informal groups, residents, and volunteers recognised as system actors
- Systems adapt to place, not place to systems

Outcome difference:

Consultation delivers projects *in* place.

Co-design reshapes the system *with* place.

3. Inequalities & Lived Experience

Sport England Language

“People who face the greatest barriers to being active should be at the heart of decision-making.”

Consultation Theatre Response

- Lived experience gathered through surveys, case studies, panels
- People asked to describe problems they face
- Insight extracted, filtered, and translated by professionals
- Emotional labour without authority

Co-Design & Power-Sharing Response

- Lived experience recognised as **decision-making expertise**
- People shape priorities, funding choices, and success measures
- Community leaders paid, supported, and trusted
- Insight leads directly to power and resource shifts

Outcome difference:

Consultation amplifies voice.

Co-design redistributes influence.

4. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

Sport England Framing

- Building on strengths
- Valuing social connections
- Supporting existing community activity

Consultation Theatre Pattern

- Asset language used, but deficit questions dominate:
 - “What are the barriers?”
 - “What’s missing?”
- Assets acknowledged, then bypassed for funded provision
- Community activity seen as informal or risky

Co-Design & Power-Sharing Pattern

- Starts with:
 - “What already works here?”
 - “Who already brings people together?”
- Investment strengthens existing networks
- Informal activity legitimised and protected
- Funding flexes around community reality

Outcome difference:

Consultation maps assets.

Co-design mobilises them.

5. System Change vs Programme Delivery

Sport England Aim

“Shift from delivery to enablement.”

Consultation Theatre Reality

- Delivery models remain dominant

- “System change” described but not enacted
- Organisations retain control to manage risk
- Community engagement used to support delivery outcomes

Co-Design & Power-Sharing Reality

- Communities influence:
 - What gets funded
 - Who leads activity
 - How success is defined
- Institutions accept uncertainty and slower progress
- Risk shared rather than offloaded

Outcome difference:

Consultation optimises delivery systems.

Co-design transforms them.

6. Measurement & Outcomes

Sport England Outcome Areas

- Physical wellbeing
- Mental wellbeing
- Individual development
- Social & community development

Consultation Theatre Measurement Bias

- Participation numbers
- Sessions delivered
- Short-term engagement
- Individual behaviour change

Co-Design & Power-Sharing Measurement Shift

- Confidence and agency
- Strength of social ties
- Local leadership emergence
- Community stewardship and continuity

- Reduced reliance on external delivery

Outcome difference:

Consultation shows activity happening.

Co-design shows place becoming stronger.

7. Trust, Legitimacy, and Sustainability

Sport England Concern

- Long-term impact beyond funding
- Community trust in systems
- Sustainable participation

Consultation Theatre Risk

- Engagement fatigue
- Loss of credibility
- Participation drops when funding ends
- Communities feel “done to”

Co-Design & Power-Sharing Benefit

- Trust built through shared control
- Pride rooted in ownership
- Activity continues because it belongs locally
- Systems gain legitimacy, not just compliance

Summary Mapping Table

Sport England Principle	Consultation Theatre	Co-Design & Power-Sharing
Locally led	Local delivery	Local decision-making
Lived experience	Insight source	Governing expertise
Asset-based	Assets mapped	Assets mobilised
System change	Rhetorical	Structural
Pride in Place	Encouraged	Emergent
Sustainability	Funded	Owned

Bottom Line (in Sport England Terms)

Consultation Theatre helps us do things *better*.

Co-design and power-sharing help us do *different things* — and that’s where system change lives.

Red Flag Checklist: Is This Insight Activity Community-Owned or System-Led?

This checklist is designed for community organisations, delivery partners, and residents involved in Hartlepool Place Expansion. If multiple red flags are present, the activity is likely **extractive rather than asset-based**.

● Red Flag 1: You Didn't Help Shape the Questions

If insight questions were written elsewhere (or generated by AI) and presented as fixed, this signals external ownership of learning.

Ask: Who decided what matters?

● Red Flag 2: You're Asked to Collect Data, Not Interpret It

If your role ends at gathering notes, surveys, or recordings — and analysis happens elsewhere — learning is being removed from place.

Ask: When do we make sense of this together?

● Red Flag 3: Raw Data Must Be Handed Over Immediately

If there is no time or permission to reflect locally before submission, insight is being extracted.

Ask: What stays with the community first?

● Red Flag 4: Assets Are Secondary to Problems

If conversations focus mainly on barriers, gaps, or deficits, the process is not ABCD-led.

Ask: Where do strengths, relationships, and informal activity show up?

● Red Flag 5: Interpretation Happens in Rooms You're Not In

If themes and priorities are agreed in meetings you do not attend, ownership has already shifted.

Ask: Who decides what this means?

● Red Flag 6: Language Changes as Insight Moves Upwards

If local language is replaced with system or funding terminology without your involvement, meaning is being diluted.

Ask: Whose words are being used?

● **Red Flag 7: You Don't See the Learning Come Back**

If there is no clear feedback on how insight influenced decisions, trust and pride are undermined.

Ask: What changed because of this?

● **Red Flag 8: The Process Feels Like Compliance**

If the activity feels like a task to unlock funding rather than a chance to build confidence and connection, it is transactional.

Ask: Who benefits most from this learning?

● **Red Flag 9: Local Curiosity Is Discouraged**

If challenging assumptions or raising unexpected insights is subtly resisted, the process is controlling rather than enabling.

Ask: What are we not supposed to say?

● **Red Flag 10: The Same People Always Do the Learning**

If learning always accumulates with the Steering Group or system partners, local capacity is not being built.

Ask: Who is becoming more confident through this?

Interpreting the Checklist

- **0–2 red flags:** Largely community-owned learning
 - **3–5 red flags:** Mixed model — clarify roles urgently
 - **6+ red flags:** Extractive insight gathering — pause and reset
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Core Question

If communities do the work, but the system does the learning,

whose place is this, really?

How to Use This Checklist



- As a conversation starter with partners
- As a self-protection tool for community organisations
- As a governance reflection for Steering Groups

If Pride in Place is the goal, **learning must belong to the place first.**

What Good Looks Like: A Community-Owned Learning Checklist

This counter-checklist describes what *good* looks like when insight gathering is genuinely asset-based, locally owned, and aligned with Pride in Place. The more statements you can confidently agree with, the healthier the learning model.

✔ Good Sign 1: Communities Shape the Questions

Insight questions are co-created locally, reflecting lived experience, curiosity, and what matters in Hartlepool.

We can say: “These questions sound like us.”

✔ Good Sign 2: Learning Is Built Into the Process

Time, space, and resource are allocated for local reflection and interpretation — not just data collection.

We can say: “We are expected to make sense of this, not just gather it.”

✔ Good Sign 3: Assets Lead the Conversation

Strengths, relationships, informal activity, and local leadership are the starting point for insight.

We can say: “This process helps us see what’s already strong here.”

✔ Good Sign 4: Interpretation Happens Close to Community

Sense-making sessions happen in the place, with residents, volunteers, and local organisations present.

We can say: “Meaning is being shaped by people who live this every day.”

✔ Good Sign 5: Language Stays Local First

Insights are first captured in community language, stories, and examples before any system translation.

We can say: “Our words haven’t been edited out.”

✔ Good Sign 6: Steering Groups Listen Before They Decide

Strategic partners attend to hear, learn, and support — not to control interpretation.

We can say: “They’re here to understand, not to direct.”

✔ **Good Sign 7: Learning Flows Both Ways**

Communities learn about themselves *and* the system learns how to adapt to place.

We can say: “This has changed how everyone thinks — not just us.”

✔ **Good Sign 8: Feedback Loops Are Visible and Timely**

Communities can clearly see how their insight influenced priorities, funding, or action.

We can say: “We know what happened because of this.”

✔ **Good Sign 9: Confidence and Leadership Grow**

People involved feel more confident to act, connect others, and shape future activity.

We can say: “This has strengthened us, not just informed them.”

✔ **Good Sign 10: Pride Is a By-Product**

Participants feel valued, respected, and proud of their contribution to Hartlepool.

We can say: “This made us feel like authors of our place, not subjects of a programme.”

Using the Counter-Checklist

- Use alongside the **Red Flag Checklist** to balance challenge with aspiration
 - As a design tool before insight work begins
 - As a reflection tool after learning activity
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Bottom Line

When learning is owned locally, **pride, capability, and sustainability follow.**

This is what good looks like for Hartlepool Place Expansion.

Notes - Asset Based Community Development

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach to community development that focuses on identifying, mobilizing, and strengthening the **existing assets** of a community rather than concentrating on its problems or deficiencies.

Core Idea

ABCD starts from the belief that every **community has strengths**—skills, relationships, institutions, and resources—that can be leveraged to drive positive change from within.

Key Principles

- **Asset-focused, not deficit-focused:** Emphasizes what communities *have* rather than what they lack.
- **Community-driven:** Residents are active leaders and co-creators, not passive recipients of services.
- **Relationship-centred:** Strong social connections are seen as essential to sustainable development.
- **Local ownership:** Solutions are rooted in local knowledge and priorities.
- **Inclusive participation:** Engages individuals, associations, and institutions across the community.

Types of Assets

ABCD typically identifies five main categories:

1. **Individual assets** – skills, talents, and experiences of residents
2. **Associational assets** – community groups, clubs, faith-based organizations
3. **Institutional assets** – schools, libraries, hospitals, local government
4. **Physical assets** – land, buildings, infrastructure
5. **Economic assets** – local businesses, informal economies, financial resources

Process

- Map community assets
- Build relationships among residents and organizations
- Mobilize assets toward shared goals
- Partner externally only to support locally driven initiatives



Benefits

- Builds community confidence and leadership
- Encourages sustainable, locally appropriate solutions
- Reduces dependency on outside interventions
- Strengthens social capital and civic engagement

In Short

Asset-Based Community Development is about communities creating change **by mobilising their own strengths, fostering resilience, self-determination, and long-term development.**

Covering Note

This document has been developed to support a shared, constructive conversation about how insight, learning, and ownership operate within **Hartlepool Place Expansion**.

It reflects:

- Hartlepool Sport's commitment to **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)**
- The Hartlepool Board's ambition to deliver the national **Pride in Place** agenda
- A collective desire to ensure that insight gathering strengthens local confidence, capability, and authorship

The principles and checklists are not intended to replace existing governance or strategy. Instead, they are offered as a **practical alignment tool** — helping partners, community organisations, and steering groups reflect on *how* learning happens, *where* it sits, and *who* benefits.

They are deliberately framed to:

- Encourage shared learning rather than assign blame
- Make power and ownership visible in a neutral way
- Support system coherence by building on insight already generated in Hartlepool

Used well, this document can help ensure that:

- Community organisations are not positioned solely as data collectors
- Locally generated asset-based insight is valued and actively used
- Strategic decision-making remains connected to lived experience

Above all, it is intended to keep a simple question at the centre of Place Expansion:

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

Partners are encouraged to use this document as a live reference point — to test assumptions, guide design, and support continuous learning as Pride in Place is rolled out locally.