



# **PRIDE IN PLACE, CO-OPERATION AND DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL**

Robert Owen Day – Online Event – Transforming  
the Declining High Street

**Co-operative Solutions**

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**Communities, Equality, Human Rights and Co-operative  
Solutions for Place-Based Renewal**

# INTRODUCTION

Across the UK, the Government's £5bn Pride in Place (PiP) programme represents one of the most significant place-based regeneration and community renewal initiatives in recent decades. The programme aims to provide long-term investment into communities considered "left behind", with neighbourhood boards and community participation placed at the centre of delivery.

## Yet the key question remains:

Can communities genuinely shape and own the future of their places, or will Pride in Place become another centrally managed regeneration programme operating under the language of participation?



This publication for the Robert Owen Day 2026 online event explores why co-operation, co-operatives, equality, inclusion and democratic participation are essential if Pride in Place is to achieve lasting and meaningful change.

## Robert Owen and the Relevance of Co-operation Today

The continuing relevance of Robert Owen is profound.

Owen understood that strong communities are not created simply through economic investment alone. They are built through:



Dignity



Education



Inclusion



Mutual responsibility



Participation



Shared opportunity



Collective ownership

His work in Newtown and New Lanark demonstrated that communities flourish when people are supported, valued and able to influence the conditions in which they live.

Owen recognised that children and young people were not merely future citizens but valuable members of communities in the present. He believed that investment in early years, education and social wellbeing strengthened the whole community.

He also understood that co-operation was not simply an economic mechanism, but a democratic and social principle, one rooted in shared benefit, participation and human dignity.

Today, those same principles sit at the heart of debates surrounding Pride in Place.

The continuing international recognition of Owen and the co-operative movement through the International Co-operative Alliance, Cultural Co-operative Heritage work and UNESCO recognition demonstrates the enduring global significance of co-operative values and heritage

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## Pride in Place: Opportunity and Risk

The Pride in Place programme seeks to support nearly 250 communities through long-term investment, neighbourhood governance and community participation.

### The programme explicitly references:

- » Community leadership
- » Local empowerment
- » Neighbourhood boards
- » Co-created plans
- » Community ownership
- » Local decision making

### At its best, Pride in Place represents:

- » A shift away from short-term regeneration
- » Recognition that communities understand their own needs
- » An opportunity to rebuild civic infrastructure
- » A move toward community wealth building
- » Support for locally rooted institutions



However, concerns are increasingly emerging nationally regarding:

- » Tokenistic engagement
- » Institutional dominance
- » Lack of representative governance
- » Overreliance on “usual suspects”
- » Rushed implementation
- » Existing power structures reproducing themselves within neighbourhood boards



Recent discussions within the co-operative and community development sectors have openly questioned whether genuine power is truly being shared.

As Frances Northrop of the New Economics Foundation observed in recent discussion surrounding Pride in Place, the challenge is not simply creating boards, but ensuring that power genuinely shifts toward communities themselves.

### A Central Democratic Question

A key issue facing Pride in Place is not simply funding. It is governance.

### The central question here is

How do institutions genuinely share power with communities?



There is a profound difference between:



Consultation



shared decision making

Communities know the difference between:

- » Being properly included, respected and heard
- » Being managed

Without genuine community influence, Pride in Place risks reproducing the very forms of exclusion, distrust and disengagement it seeks to address.

The Government's own guidance recognises that neighbourhood boards should transition toward genuinely community-led delivery models over time.

This makes democratic participation and accountable governance central to the programme's long-term success.

## Real Inclusion, Not Managed Inclusion

A further central democratic question for Pride in Place is not only whether communities are “included”, but what kind of inclusion is being offered.



**There is a profound difference between:**

- » Real inclusion and tokenistic inclusion
- » Community power and managed participation
- » Investment in existing community assets and replacement of community provision
- » Co-production and consultation after decisions have already been shaped

## Equality, Human Rights and Inclusion

Pride in Place cannot be reduced to physical regeneration alone.

**Strong places require:**



Equality



Participation



Belonging



Accessibility



Representation



Democratic inclusion



Fairness

**A human rights and equality framework requires asking:**

- » Who is excluded from decision making?
- » Whose voices carry weight?
- » Which communities remain ‘marginalised’?
- » Are governance structures genuinely accessible?
- » Are protected characteristic groups represented?
- » Are equality impacts properly considered?

## This includes ensuring meaningful inclusion of:

- » Disabled people
  - » Racialised communities
  - » LGBTQ+ communities
  - » Women
  - » Working-class communities
  - » Older people
  - » Refugees and migrants
- » Carers
  - » Children and young people
  - » Families
  - » Rural communities
  - » Faith communities
  - » Communities experiencing poverty and exclusion

## Participation without influence is not empowerment.

If equality and inclusion are not embedded from the outset, placemaking can simply reproduce existing inequalities.

### Intergenerational Inclusion and Children's Participation

Robert Owen's early educational philosophy remains highly relevant to Pride in Place today.

#### Communities are strongest when:

- » Children are valued
- » Young people are listened to
- » Older and younger generations connect
- » Participation begins early
- » Civic belonging is nurtured across generations

#### Intergenerational inclusion strengthens:

- » Social cohesion
- » Democratic culture
- » Community resilience
- » Local identity
- » Belonging

Pride in Place must not simply be about 'working age adults' deciding what communities need.

Children and young people and older people too, should be recognised as active stakeholders in shaping the future of the places in which they live.



## Displacement and Replacement Should be Avoided

Pride in Place must also avoid creating new structures which displace, duplicate or replace existing community organisations, grassroots provision, early years and family support provisions, youth groups, older people's services and forums, co-operatives, voluntary organisations and trusted local networks.

A strong and inclusive approach is to work with what already exists, invest in community infrastructure, and build capacity alongside local people rather than displacing them and starting again from the centre.

This is particularly important for protected equality communities, including Disabled people, including neurodivergent people older people, younger people, racialised communities, women, LGBTQ+ communities, carers, faith communities and communities experiencing poverty and exclusion. The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty require public bodies to consider how policies and programmes affect people with protected characteristics, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations

Sure Start provides an important lesson. Parliamentary scrutiny recognised that Sure Start Local Programmes had pioneered a community development approach which helped reach families often least likely to engage with traditional services, but also recorded concern that this approach was not always preserved once Children's Centres came under local authority management. Communities too decried how Sure Start in operation displaced and replaced long established community developed and led early years provisions by way of centralising funding and not including them in the funding allocations. The lesson for Pride in Place is clear: investment should not result in the colonisation of resources or centralising or institutionalising community provision in ways that weaken the local relationships, trust and expertise that made it effective.

Similarly, youth participation initiatives such as the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund were designed to give young people control over resources and decision-making, with evaluation evidence showing that young people were involved as decision-makers and that the funds supported the principle of provision "by young people, for young people".

Older people's participation programmes also offer lessons. Better Government for Older People was established to improve services and give older people more say in how services were run, while learning from this and building on this, later age-friendly and older people's forum models have recognised older people as experts by experience, community contributors and civic leaders.

The recurring lesson is that communities should not be temporarily empowered only for their voice to be diluted, defunded or absorbed once they become confident, organised and demanding. Pride in Place must value community challenge as a sign of democratic health, not as a problem to be managed.

Real inclusion means communities are not only invited into the room. They help set the agenda, shape the priorities, control resources, scrutinise delivery and hold institutions to account.

The central democratic test for Pride in Place is not whether communities are included, but whether inclusion is real, representative and powerful, not tokenistic, controlled or designed around existing institutional agendas.

## Why Co-operation Matters in Pride in Place

Co-operation matters because the challenges facing communities today cannot be solved through division, competition, central control or isolated decision making alone.

### Communities are strongest when people:

- » Work together
- » Share responsibility
- » Pool skills and resources
- » Collectively shape solutions
- » Participate in decisions affecting their lives



Co-operation creates structures through which people can move from being passive recipients of services to active participants in community life.

### At its heart, co-operation is about:

» Dignity

» Participation

» Mutual support

» Democratic ownership

» Fairness

» Inclusion

» Shared benefit

This is why co-operatives remain highly relevant to modern place-based renewal and Pride in Place.

## Co-operation Strengthens Communities

### Co-operative approaches help communities:

- » Retain local wealth
- » Build local assets
- » Strengthen civic participation
- » Increase democratic accountability
- » Create long-term resilience
- » Reduce isolation and exclusion
- » Build social cohesion and belonging

Unlike extractive economic models, co-operative structures are rooted in communities and designed to deliver shared social and economic value.

## Co-operation Builds Democratic Participation

One of the greatest challenges facing modern society is democratic disengagement and loss of trust.

### People often feel:



Decisions are made elsewhere



Consultation changes little



Institutions are distant



Participation is symbolic rather than meaningful

### Co-operative models help address this by embedding:



Shared governance



Participation



Accountability



Collective ownership

They provide practical mechanisms for communities to influence and shape local priorities.

Participation without influence is not empowerment.

Co-operation provides pathways toward genuine influence.

## Co-operation and Equality

Co-operation also matters because it creates opportunities for more inclusive participation.

### Strong co-operative approaches can help ensure:

- » Disabled people are included
- » Older and younger generations participate
- » Racialised communities influence decisions
- » Working-class voices are heard
- » Local lived experience is valued
- » Barriers to participation are reduced

### This aligns strongly with:

- » Equality principles
- » Human rights frameworks
- » Community inclusion
- » Democratic renewal
- » Unity
- » Fairness
- » Better outcomes for everyone

## Co-operation and Community Wealth

Traditional regeneration models often allow wealth and resources to leave communities.

### Co-operative approaches instead help:

- » Keep wealth local
- » Create locally rooted jobs
- » Support local enterprise
- » Retain community assets
- » Strengthen local economies

This is why community wealth building strategies increasingly recognise co-operatives, community benefit societies and community land trusts as essential tools for sustainable local development.



## Robert Owen and Co-operation

Robert Owen recognised over two centuries ago that communities flourish when people work together for mutual benefit rather than against one another in competition and inequality.

### He understood that:

» Education matters

» Belonging matters

» Dignity matters

» Participation matters

» Shared Responsibility matters

Most importantly, he recognised that people thrive when they are valued and included within community life.

Those same principles remain profoundly relevant today.

## Why Co-operation Matters for Pride in Place

### Pride in Place will only succeed if communities experience:

- » Genuine influence
- » Democratic participation
- » Inclusion
- » Equity
- » Belonging
- » Shared ownership
- » Long-term local investment

Co-operation matters because it provides practical ways to achieve this.

### It moves communities:

From consultation



Toward co-production



Toward co-ownership.

It enables communities not simply to receive change, but to shape, own and sustain it together.



### The strongest places are places where:

- » People matter
- » Voices are heard
- » Diversity is valued
- » Power is shared
- » Communities work together for the common good.

## Why Co-operatives Matter in Pride in Place

Co-operatives provide practical structures capable of delivering many of Pride in Place's ambitions.

### Co-operative approaches offer:

- » Democratic ownership
- » Shared governance
- » Local accountability
- » Long-term stewardship
- » Community participation
- » Economic inclusion
- » Local wealth retention

### This includes:

- » Worker co-operatives
- » Housing co-operatives
- » Community land trusts
- » Community benefit societies
- » Social care co-operatives
- » Cultural co-operatives
- » Community energy initiatives
- » Community anchor organisations

The co-operative sector has argued strongly that Pride in Place should not simply fund projects, but help communities build sustainable local institutions capable of continuing beyond funding cycles.

Co-operatives UK has also highlighted the importance of co-operative governance models within neighbourhood boards and community wealth building strategies.

## Community Wealth Building and Local Economies

Traditional regeneration frequently results in wealth extraction from communities.

### Community wealth building seeks instead to

- » Retain wealth locally
- » Strengthen local supply chains
- » Create good local jobs
- » Support locally rooted enterprise
- » Increase democratic ownership
- » Reduce economic inequality

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has warned that Pride in Place funding risks “leaking out” of communities unless structural approaches to community wealth building are embedded.



### Co-operative and community ownership models help communities:

- » Retain assets
- » Build resilience
- » Strengthen civic participation
- » Create longer-term sustainability

### This is particularly important in communities affected by:

- » Austerity
- » Deindustrialisation
- » Declining high streets
- » Rural exclusion
- » Economic inequality

## Belonging and Community Identity

Belonging matters.

### People thrive when they feel:

- » Seen
- » Valued
- » Represented
- » Connected
- » Able to contribute
- » Able to influence change

Pride in Place should therefore not simply improve spaces.

### It should strengthen:

- » Relationships
- » Participation
- » Community identity
- » Social cohesion
- » Democratic confidence

Communities flourish when people feel they matter.

## Challenges and Risks

There are real challenges facing Pride in Place:

» Consultation fatigue

» Short implementation timescales

» Institutional risk aversion

» Dominance of established power structures

» Lack of representative governance

» Insufficient community infrastructure

» Exclusion of marginalised groups

» Unequal access to resources

» Lack of co-operative education and support

The temptation for institutions to revert to traditional top-down approaches remains strong.

### This is why:

- » Transparency
- » Accountability
- » Equality analysis
- » Democratic participation
- » Co-operative education
- » Community organising

Must remain central.



## Co-operative Solutions for Pride in Place

Co-operation offers a practical and sustainable framework for democratic placemaking.

### Co-operative approaches can help:

- » Build trust
- » Distribute power more fairly
- » Create accountable governance
- » Strengthen civic participation
- » Retain local wealth
- » Support inclusion
- » Build long-term community resilience

### Most importantly, co-operatives move communities:

- » From consultation
- » Toward co-production
- » Toward co-ownership.

This reflects the core challenge of Pride in Place itself.

## Conclusion

Pride in Place represents an important opportunity. But meaningful renewal cannot simply be delivered to communities.

### It must be shaped:

» With communities

» For communities

» By communities

The relevance of Robert Owen remains strikingly contemporary.

### He recognised that communities flourish when:

- » People are valued
- » Children are included
- » Dignity is protected
- » Participation is real
- » Co-operation replaces exclusion and isolation

Co-operation is not an abstract ideal.

It is a practical, democratic and sustainable approach to building stronger places, stronger economies and stronger communities.

### If Pride in Place is to succeed, it must place:

- » Equality
- » Human rights
- » Democratic participation
- » Community ownership
- » Intergenerational inclusion
- » Co-operation

At its very centre.

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