

BECOMING A NATION OF NEIGHBOURS

The political story for neighbourhood renewal — told from the ground up

Drawing on visits to nine community organisations across Britain, alongside focus groups and national surveys
Demos & UCL Policy Lab • Sept 2026

1. THE CHALLENGE: A FRAYING SOCIAL FABRIC

Isolation is deepening. Community organisations are trying to stop the social fabric from unravelling



Holding the fabric together

As more people are pulled into the cycle through gaps in the state, community organisations (COs) are stretched thin — trying to hold the fabric together with limited space, volunteers and funding.

This isn't just personal. A fraying social fabric ripples far beyond individual wellbeing:

- Low trust in public services
- High NEET rates
- Heavy welfare burden
- Higher rates of mental ill-health
- Social polarisation

↓ Communities see threads of hope — but challenges in rebuilding the social fabric

2. WHAT COMMUNITIES WANT TO CHANGE

Simple, everyday threads of connection — and the doubts standing in the way

What communities want	What's making communities sceptical
The small things matter. A chat, a gossip, a cup of tea - these are the the small, everyday threads that bind neighbours together. Supportive, resilient communities. Small acts of neighbourliness build up over time into real community strength.	Doubt it's achievable. Time, money, technology and apathy feel like insurmountable barriers to reweaving community life. Doubt about the government's commitment. Communities question whether politicians will really walk the walk on backing communities.

↓ Community organisations are already weaving these threads together

3. THE POWER OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Three strands that strengthen the social fabric — the role COs are playing in neighbourhoods across Britain

Empowering local people Laying the foundation for connections in communities Building confidence and social capital Upskilling local people and empowering them to share their skills	Forging resilient communities Remaining uniquely adaptable to changing local needs Carrying communities' heritage and legacy Strengthening the fabric of civic life	A pillar of hope for the public 83% of CO participants trust their community, vs 60% of the general public 1 in 2 see COs as a source of hope to make things better, vs 1 in 4 as a safeguard in hard times
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Three strands, woven into a stronger social fabric

The potential to fuel national renewal and optimism

Empowered communities mean a more optimistic Britain.

A community-centric devolution model would, compared to a council-centric one, make the public more positive about...

...reducing loneliness & mental ill-health	+37% vs +25%	...local opportunities for young people	+42% vs +33%	...having a say in local matters	+26% vs +20%
...the government	+12% vs +8%	...Andy Burnham	+19% vs +16%	...the future of Britain	+14% vs +12%

↓ To unlock that power, political leaders need the right words, principles and actions

4. A NARRATIVE TOOLBOX

The language, principles and actions to weave the story together

Language	Principles	Actions
Frame it as an aspiration. "We should aspire to become a Nation of Neighbours" polls better than claiming it already is one. "Neighbours" = "community members". Use them interchangeably — not everyone welcomes closer ties with next door. Avoid rosy or grandiose claims. The public spot political spin, and will snark at an over-painted picture.	Convey togetherness, support & respect. Model those values, or risk being seen as hypocritical. Be honest and down-to-earth. Acknowledge real problems; talk about the small things and everyday life, not grand strategy. Focus on future and past. A social fabric which connects to the past, but is designed for what's next.	Give COs public recognition. Fund local organisations and public spaces — the public wants to see it, not just hear it. Treat COs as equal partners. Build the agenda as a shared endeavour, rather than deferring or dictating to COs. Offer a fair deal for services delivered. If pharmacies are paid for prescriptions, COs should be paid for social ones.