

# Social Capital and Neighbourhood Renewal

Monday 24<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025

## Participant Biographies



### **Mr Daniel Aldrich**

An award-winning author, Daniel has published five books including *Building Resilience* and *Black Wave*, more than 110 peer-reviewed articles, and written op-eds for the New York Times, CNN, HuffPost, and many other media outlets. He has spent more than five years in India, Japan, and Africa carrying out fieldwork and his work has been funded by the Fulbright Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the Abe Foundation, the Rasmussen Foundation, and the Japan Foundation, among other institutions. In 2021 he was Klein Lecturer at Northeastern University and won the 2024 Outstanding Teaching Award there. As Dean's Professor of Resilience, Daniel directs the Resilience Studies Program and co-directs the Global Resilience Institute at Northeastern.



### **Mr Stephen Aldridge CB**

Stephen is Director for Analysis and Data at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

A government economist by background, he has also worked in the Department of Trade and Industry (now the Department for Business and Trade); various predecessors to his current department; the Cabinet Office; and Her Majesty's Treasury.

Amongst other things, Stephen is a founding trustee and Board member of the Centre for Homelessness Impact; a member of the Public Policy Committee of the British Academy; a Fellow and Council member of the Academy of Social Sciences; a trustee of Local Trust; a Governor of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research; an observer to the independent commissions on Productivity and Neighbourhoods; and an Advisory Board member at the Centre for Science and Policy at the University of Cambridge.

Stephen was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) in the Queen's birthday honours list 2007.



### **Ms Hamida Ali**

Hamida has over 20 years' experience of addressing equality and diversity in public sector organisations including local and regional government, the criminal justice system, public service broadcasting and the trade union movement. Hamida served as a councillor for Woodside ward in the London Borough of Croydon from 2014-2022. In October 2020, Hamida was elected as Leader of the Council and responsible for steering the council through a period of significant turbulence prompted by serious financial and governance problems. Prior to that, Hamida served as a cabinet member for Safer Croydon and Communities from 2016-2020 leading on community safety, community and voluntary sector relations and equality and diversity. Hamida led a public health approach to tackling serious violence, including domestic violence and knife crime. Since standing down as a councillor, Hamida has joined the team who deliver some of the leadership development programmes for councillors in leading roles for the Local Government Association.



### **Ms Sharon Avery**

Sharon has been disrupting the philanthropic world for 30 years with her creative and persuasive powers. As the CEO of Toronto Foundation, she has built a formidable city-building institution having grown its assets and impact exponentially, all in service to a more fair, just and connected city.

Under her leadership the Foundation launched the social capital research project that inspired the Foundation's ambitious new strategic plan. Starting in 2025, Sharon will guide the Foundation through its bold new mandate to grow civic engagement in Toronto by 20%. With nearly a quarter of residents identifying as lonely, Sharon has all the motivation she needs to bring city together through the power of connection.



### **Mr Mike Bailey**

Mike is a senior research scientist at Meta where he founded the Social Capital Lab, a research group that partners with academics and policy groups to study social networks, communities, and economic opportunity with an aim to release research and data to improve society. The work of the Social Capital Lab has been featured in top scientific journals such as [Nature](#) and the [Journal of Political Economy](#) and has been featured worldwide in media outlets such as [The Economist](#) and [The New York Times](#). The Social Capital Lab also led the quantitative research program in the UK for the Revealing Social Capital project Research. and Data from the Social Capital Lab are publicly available including the [Social Connectedness Index](#) and the [Social Capital Atlas](#) and more through [Meta's Data for Good program](#).



### **Ms Zoë Billingham**

Zoë is the director of IPPR North, the think tank dedicated to developing bold, progressive ideas to strengthen England's regions.

Previously, Zoë worked as a civil servant for the UK government including in HM Treasury and as economic policy adviser to the deputy prime minister during the coalition. Zoë has also led the Centre for Progressive Policy think tank and worked in finance.

Zoë regularly appears on broadcast media and writes for a range of online and print publications.

Alongside her role at IPPR North, Zoë is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and a UK2070 commissioner.



### **Ms Emily Bolton**

Emily is the CEO and co-founder of Our Future – backing people in post-industrial communities to build a thriving future. The model is being developed in partnership with citizens in Grimsby and designed to be replicated.

Emily was previously part of the founding team and latterly executive board member at Social Finance. Her work has focused on creating impact at scale. She led the setup of the first Social Impact Bond in Peterborough prison - this led to a reduction reoffending and global replication of the model. She has designed and implemented numerous initiatives which have delivered social change in entrenched issues from perpetration of domestic abuse to mental health inequalities.



### **Ms Margaret Bolton**

Margaret is Director of Policy and Communications at Local Trust. She has worked in a number of high profile policy, campaigning and communications roles including at NCVO and Arts Council England. She ran the campaign to get an equal share of lottery proceeds for charities and has led influential programmes of work on charity taxation – which significantly extended reliefs – and the reform of charity law. The last of these led to a Prime Minister's Strategy Unit project to which she was seconded as Voluntary Sector Advisor. Before joining Local Trust she was a consultant for a number of years working primarily on social investment, social innovation and charity effectiveness undertaking research and writing numerous reports including the report for the Calouste Gulbenkian Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations.



### **Ms Jo Cooper**

Jo is CEO of Back on the Map; a Charity and community business with £4.8M of residential and commercial assets in Hendon, Sunderland. Responsible for providing strategic leadership, management and direction. Jo has over 16 years of experience working in the VCS sector and is passionate about the vital and broad work of the sector. She sits on the Board of the Sunderland VCS Alliance and gives her time to support other VCS organisations.

She is driven by and committed to putting local people at the heart of regeneration and enabling social mobility. She is motivated by people in supporting disadvantaged communities to co-design locally-responsive and sustainable solutions to entrenched problems, including housing and high street regeneration, pushing for lasting social and economic change.

Skilled in Governance, Community Engagement, Theory of Change, Social Impact, Operations Management, Social Enterprise Development and Marketing with a Master of Science (MSc) focused in Urban Policy & Regeneration from Northumbria University.



### **Mr Daniel Crowe**

Dan is director of 3ni, a new social value partnership, recently spun-out from Local Trust. 3ni brings together policy, practice, research and data to support local government and public sector partners to transform neighbourhoods across the country, and is host to the national network for neighbourhood improvement, sharing best and next practice to support community-led regeneration. He previously worked in the policy team at Local Trust, in particular on the All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods, and has a background in local and regional government, regeneration and the British co-operative movement.



### **Ms Millie Dessent**

Millie works for Local Trust and has a key role in research, writing and publications work. Millie focuses on harnessing evidence from the Big Local programme and other previous neighbourhood initiatives to identify what a successful future community development programme should look like to improve outcomes and transform neighbourhoods which have faced disinvestment and decline for far too long.



### **Ms Angela Fell**

Angela is a reformed reformer who is communing in her own back yard with a mission of becoming a self-organising and renovating community.

Having worked in communities for the last 30+ years Angela stayed home after the pandemic keeping her feet on the local ground, using Asset Based Community Development through a justice lens as an underpinning pedagogy.

She is a director at Northern Heart and Soul CiC, founding member of grassroot networks in Wigan, a Greater Manchester System Changer, on the 2025 People and Places Programme and a Grandmother.

She believes small is beautiful and the neighbourhood is the primary unit of change.



### **Professor Anna Francis**

Anna is an artist and researcher whose work aims to create space to discuss and reframe city resources, through participatory art interventions.

She creates situations for herself, the public and other artists to explore places differently. In recent years the interventions which Anna has worked on focus on the city of Stoke-on-Trent, and use an action research process to recognise untapped resources, and co-create solutions with communities. This has included the development of a pocket park from an abandoned garden, and now working on retrofitting a disused pub building to become a sustainable, creative community and artist led space.

Anna is Professor of Art and Society at the University of Staffordshire, and Co-Director at The Portland Inn Project, an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation.



### **Mr Robin Fry**

Robin's role at the North East Combined Authority is to support inclusive growth across the region. His work covers equality and inclusion, social value, citizen engagement and supporting strong neighbourhoods. Prior to joining the Combined Authority Robin spent 20 years working in the voluntary and community sector. During the pandemic he led a charity that mobilised hundreds of volunteers to support vulnerable residents across North Tyneside.



### **Mr Chris Gray**

Chris is currently head of the Secretary of State's Policy Unit at the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), incubating new ideas and approaches on behalf of Lisa Nandy and covering a policy portfolio that also includes civil society and young people. Recent roles in government include Principal Private Secretary (Chief of Staff) to the Culture Secretary and Deputy Director for Policy in the Levelling Up Taskforce. Recently spent two years in the US based at Columbia University and focused on urban policy and regeneration.





### **Professor Mia Gray**

Mia's research examines the economic, social and political effects of 15 years of austerity in the UK. Austerity cuts were not felt evenly across the UK but were concentrated in low-income communities – in the form of cuts and restructuring of welfare benefits, local government funding, and legal aid. Mia's work is an in-depth look at the changes wrought by austerity -- the transformations of the local state, the dilemmas of left-behind neighbourhoods, heightened levels and types of inequality, the changing relationship between the local and central state, the weakening of the local welfare state, the enhanced importance of voluntary organisations and burgeoning levels of low-income debt.



### **Professor David Halpern**

David has been the Chief Executive of the government's Behavioural Insights Team (unofficially known as the Nudge Unit) since its inception in 2010. Prior to this, David was the founding Director of the Institute for Government, and between 2001 and 2007 the Chief Analyst at the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. David was also appointed as the What Works National Advisor in July 2013. Before entering government, David held tenure at Cambridge and posts at Oxford and Harvard. He has written several books and papers on areas relating to behavioural insights and wellbeing, including *Social Capital* (2005), the *Hidden Wealth of Nations* (2010), *Inside the Nudge Unit* (2015), and was co-author of the *MINDSPACE* report. In 2016, Halpern was elected a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences.



### **Professor Jon Lawrence**

Jon is Professor Emeritus in Modern British History at the University of Exeter. He works on modern British social, cultural and political history from the 1840s to the present. He has published extensively on the history of popular politics, electioneering and class in modern Britain. His most recent book, *Me, Me, Me? The Search for Community in Post-war England* (Oxford UP paperback, 2023) uses personal testimony collected by social scientists from the 1940s to the late 2000s to challenge conventional accounts of the death of community and the relentless rise of selfish individualism. His previous books include *Speaking for the People* (1998), and *Electing Our Masters* (2009).



### **Mr Matt Leach**

Matt is Chief Executive of Local Trust, the Lottery-funded endowment supporting long-term place-based, community-led change in 150 deprived neighbourhoods across England. Over the last decade, Local Trust has drawn on its work to pioneer new thinking about social infrastructure, neighbourhood regeneration and the challenges associated with turning around our most left-behind communities. Prior to that, Matt led social housing innovation agency HACT, was an associate director at think tank ResPublica and has held a range of senior leadership roles across the public sector, including civil society funder Capacitybuilders, the Housing Corporation, Cabinet Office and a range of other Whitehall departments and delivery agencies.



### **Ms Josie Moon**

As People and Place Lead for East Marsh United in Grimsby, Josie is deeply committed to community-led social justice, tackling poverty and inequality through collaborative action. A proud East Marshian, she works alongside partners to drive lasting change. Beyond this, she is a writer exploring myth, place, and the human condition. Her creative output includes community theatre plays, three poetry volumes, and a multimedia short film, reflecting a decade of artistic engagement.



### **Mr Andrew O'Brien**

Andrew is Head of Secretariat at the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON). Before joining ICON, he was Director of Policy and Impact at Demos. Andrew has worked in Westminster and Whitehall on policy for over a decade and a half. Andrew has written extensively on neighbourhoods, social capital, economic and public service reform. Before joining Demos, Andrew worked in policy development in the VCSE sector including at Social Enterprise UK, Charity Finance Group and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.



### **Mr Simon Patterson**

Simon joined Silver Lake in 2005 and is a Managing Director and co-head of the firm's activities in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. He has managed Silver Lake investments across a variety of sectors including software, hardware, semiconductor, healthcare technology, internet and sports. Prior to joining Silver Lake, he was a member of the founding management team of the logistics software company GF-X (acquired by Descartes) and worked in various management roles at the Financial Times. Simon holds an M.A. from King's College, Cambridge University and an M.B.A. from the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, where he was an Arjay Miller Scholar and received the Alexander Robichek Award for Finance.



### **Professor Sarah Pearson**

Sarah is Professor of Social Policy Research at the Centre for Regional Economic Research and Dean of Research, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange at Sheffield Hallam University. She is an expert in neighbourhood renewal and community engagement. She is Director of the Centre for Collaboration in Community Connectedness, a recent £10m UKRI investment under its Creating Opportunities, Improving Outcomes priority. The Centre brings together researchers, practitioners, policy makers, funders and residents to deliver an ambitious vision for better connected communities across the UK. Her other work includes a review of neighbourhood renewal (in partnership with Local Trust), and evaluations of place-based approaches to supporting young people at risk of knife crime and violence (Youth Endowment Fund), the Early Action Neighbourhood Fund (National Lottery Community Fund), and Children's Communities (Save the Children UK). Between 2001 and 2010, she was Deputy Director of the ten-year evaluation of the New Deal for Communities Programme.



### **Mr Stephen Perez**

Stephen is a dedicated community leader with a passion for improving the lives of those around him. He currently leads the Community Insight and Partnerships team at Kent Fire and Rescue Service, where he collaborates with various partners to ensure community safety and access to essential services for all communities. He is also the Chair of the Medway Independent Advisory Group to Kent Police, further demonstrating his commitment to community safety and collaboration.

His dedication to community engagement is evident in his extensive experience with the Big Local programme. Stephen has coordinated projects such as the Fit and Fed programme, which provided meals and activities for local children. He has also been instrumental in driving urban tree planting projects and establishing numerous initiatives to enhance the community, including the development of a Neighbourhood Plan, the creation of pocket parks, and the implementation of large-scale street art projects.

Stephen is most proud not of his direct involvements, but of the Medway Big Local legacy he helped establish, which continues with wonderful work in Chatham, and, of course, his three amazing children.

This multifaceted career reflects his unwavering commitment to creating positive change and improving the lives of people in his community and beyond.



### **Professor Robert Putnam**

Bob is the Malkin Research Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University. A member of the National Academy of Sciences, a Fellow of the British Academy, and past president of the American Political Science Association, in 2006 he received the Skytte Prize, the world's highest accolade for a political scientist. In 2012 Barack Obama awarded Bob the National Humanities Medal, the nation's highest honor for contributions to the humanities. He has written fifteen books, translated into twenty languages, including *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Italy* and *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, both among the most cited (and bestselling) social science works in nearly a century. He has consulted for Presidents Carter, Clinton, Bush 43, and Obama, as well as presidents and prime ministers from the UK, Ireland, and Finland to South Korea and Singapore. His most recent book, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* (2020), is a widely praised study of broad 20th century American economic, social, political, and cultural trends.



### **Professor Pedro Ramos Pinto**

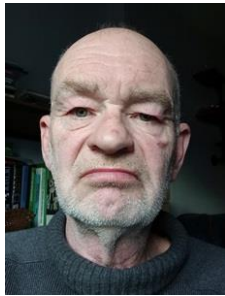
Pedro is an historian and social scientist with an interest in democratic civic participation and the politics of inequality. He has written extensively on the topics of social capital, urban grassroots politics in Southern Europe and how we might think historically about inequality. Amongst his works are a volume on the role of urban issues in the transition to democracy in Portugal, *Lisbon Rising: Urban Social Movements in the Portuguese Revolution, 1974-1975* (2013); and collections on the role of history in the present day - *The Impact of History* (2015) - and on the history of Universal Basic Income ideas - *Universal Basic Income in Historical Perspective* (2021).





### **Mr Marc Stears**

Marc is an internationally regarded academic, political strategist, speechwriter and executive educator, who specialises in creating dynamic collaborations between academic researchers and broader society. Currently the inaugural Director of the UCL Policy Lab, Marc has previously been Director of the Sydney Policy Lab at the University of Sydney, CEO of the New Economics Foundation, Professor of political theory at the University of Oxford and chief speechwriter to the UK Labour Party. He is the author of several books, including *Out of the Ordinary*, published by Harvard University Press in 2021 and with his friend and co-author Tom Baldwin, *England: Seven Myths that Changed a Nation and How to Set them Straight*, published by Bloomsbury in 2024.



### **Mr Lachlan Stuart**

Lachlan Stuart worked for twenty years in the Scottish Government, for the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and in the House of Commons office of the Leader of the Opposition before joining Stoke-on-Trent City Council in 2024 as a special policy advisor.



### **Mr Kyle Vanelli**

Kyle is a Policy Officer working for Local Trust. He leads Local Trust's policy development on public health, managing partnerships with the NHS Confederation and others to influence the NHS 10-year Plan. He also leads Local Trust's policy development on housing, including research on transferrable lessons from the New Towns programme and building evidence on the long-term importance of social infrastructure to places.



### **Mrs Melanie Waters OBE**

Melanie joined The Royal Foundation as Executive Director – Programmes in the summer of 2024. Prior to this, Melanie enjoyed a rewarding career in the military charity sector, spanning 13 years. Throughout this time, she focused on delivering transformational change and growth, initially as the first CEO of The Poppy Factory, the iconic charity which manufactures the poppies, crosses and wreaths for the Remembrance period. She took over as CEO at Help for Heroes in 2016 from inspirational founders Bryn and Emma Parry and led the ground-breaking charity into the next phase of maturity, cementing its credentials as a sustainable driver for change led by the needs of the Armed Forces Community.

In her earlier career, Melanie held significant roles in the commercial sector, leading the External Affairs, Business Improvement and Operations for companies such as the Automobile Association (The AA) and Unite Students. Having graduated in Law, Melanie joined The AA as a consumer facing paralegal and later became one of the first female breakdown patrol managers. She attained her MBA in 2005.

In non-executive roles, Melanie was the Vice Chair of the Confederation of Service Charities, a Director of the Forces in Mind Trust and was on the Governing Body of Women in Defence. Melanie's personal experience of supporting her father through his Mesothelioma illness was the driving force behind Melanie's trusteeship at Mesothelioma UK in 2019. Melanie is a Liveryman at the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers, a member of their Charity Committee and the Charities Sub Committee. She has been a Board Member of the In & Out (Naval & Military Club) since 2022.

Melanie was awarded the OBE in 2017 for services to the Armed Forces.



### **Mr Rich Wilson**

Rich, CEO of Iswe, is a leading voice in democratic innovation. He is currently working to establish a permanent [Global Citizens' Assembly](#) to give millions of people a powerful role in decision-making.

In 2003 he founded [Involve](#), which under his leadership became a leading international centre for democratic innovation research, innovation and policy-making. He played a leading role in the Blair and Brown governments on democratic reform.

Rich is a trustee of the Local Trust. He is a senior policy adviser to the UK government and has been an adviser to the UNDP, WHO, OECD, EU and many national and local governments as well as NGOs and social movements. In 2022 he received [the Democracy Network Equality and Power award](#).

He started his career as a climate analyst working for SPRU, the IPPC and the Environment Council. He has written many policy reports, blogs on the [Guardian](#), [DeSmog](#), [Carnegie Europe](#), [New Internationalist](#), [Open Democracy](#), is author of the 'Anti Hero' book and a [Clore Social Fellow](#).



### **Mr Ben Wood**

Ben advises on deprivation and neighbourhood renewal policy as part of the Deputy Prime Minister's Policy Unit in the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Previously Ben worked as an adviser to Angela Rayner and other members of the Shadow Cabinet in Opposition, prior to the General Election.



### **Dr Michael Woolcock**

Michael is Lead Social Scientist in the World Bank's Development Research Group, where he has worked since 1998. For nineteen of these years, he has also been an Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School. His research focuses on the social dimensions of economic development, particularly as it pertains to enhancing policy implementation, the legitimacy of local justice systems, and assessing complex interventions. His earlier work entailed articulating a framework for connecting social capital theory to the process of economic development, and (with others) curating quantitative and qualitative tools for assessing it. An Australian national, he has a PhD in comparative-historical sociology from Brown University.