



Better Places For A Better Quality Of Life





The Better Places approach aims to guide local authorities, developers, landowners and investors towards:

- Delivering more value and benefit to the wellbeing of communities through the way new development is designed and delivered
- Understanding the importance, and the potential for positive impact, of taking an evidence-based approach to social value
- Applying the evidence to make better informed decisions in spatial planning and land use

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With your reading experience in mind, we have built in easy ways for you to navigate this document.

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Foreword

BY PROFESSOR FLORA SAMUEL, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

There is a growing consensus that the built environment plays a significant part in shaping our lives, health and wellbeing. How we live, work and interact was thrown into sharp focus during the pandemic lockdowns and more erratic weather patterns mean the effects of climate change are no longer possible to ignore. Business as usual is no longer an option.

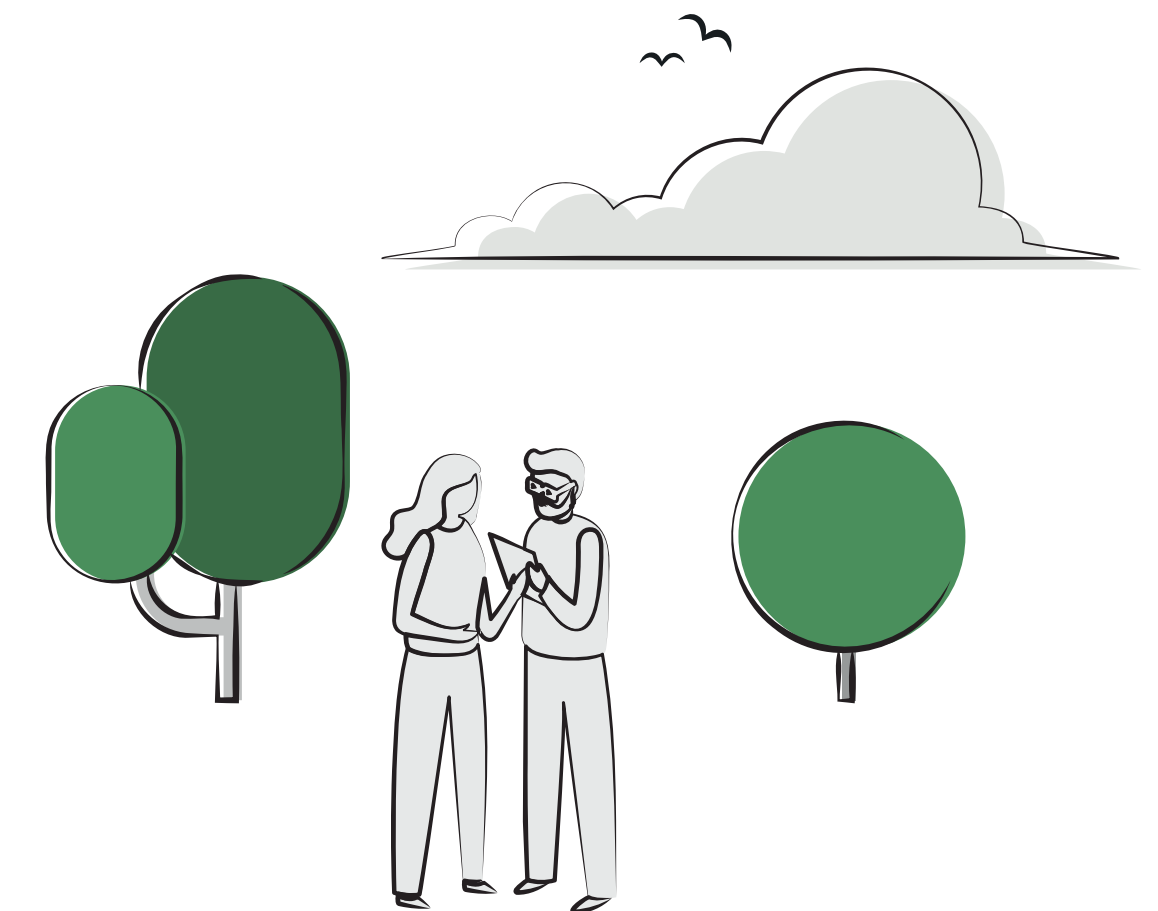
Climate change is a social justice issue. There is an urgent need to improve on how we work with communities to plan, develop and deliver sustainable buildings and neighbourhoods fit for the 21st century. To do this, we must focus on people and their quality of life, bringing together the general public, developers and local government.

Momentum is building to deliver better social and environmental outcomes through combination of policy, financial and social drivers aided by advances in geospatial mapping, data collection and analysis. Planning and delivering better places starts with understanding the communities that live there and giving greater visibility to issues which, by being difficult to quantify, are often overlooked.

The Quality of Life Foundation is committed to making health and wellbeing central to the way we create and care for homes and neighbourhoods. Stantec's Better Places research programme with the University of Reading argues that the best way to include social value considerations in strategic decision-making around development is through holistic digital map-based planning that brings together relevant quantitative and qualitative data capturing social, environment and economic factors.

Last summer we saw this approach put into practice in a three month-long community consultation exercise at Harlow & Gilston Garden Town, which will deliver over 20,000 new homes across five councils. It was funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as part of the government's drive to modernise the planning system using digital technology to increase community participation. The methodology builds on the AHRC funded Community Consultation for Quality of Life project (www.ccqol.org), a four nation exploration of accessible digital map making with communities.

We hope that councils, landowners, developers and investors embrace this map-based approach to evidence based and transparent decision making. Putting communities at the centre of development plans and taking a holistic, long-term view is key to making informed decisions that shape our built environment and will affect generations to come.





Introduction

There is a huge opportunity to deliver much more value and benefit to the wellbeing of communities through the way we design and deliver new development. This report makes clear the importance and potential of taking an evidence-based approach to social value and using it to make better-informed decisions in spatial planning and land use.

Here we describe an innovative approach that can help local authorities, land promoters, developers and investors to embed a community's needs, aspirations and wellbeing into strategic decisions and explain how Quality of Life Foundation and Stantec came together to apply this approach with Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) through a project funded by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

We set out how the organisations developed a baseline for social value in Harlow and Gilston, an area about to undergo significant growth, by combining over 40 datasets capturing social, economic and environmental data with an extensive engagement programme with the residents of Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas. Through the establishment of this baseline, HGGT - the partnership responsible for delivering growth in the area - now has a way of monitoring the social value impacts of the changes they make.

Finally, we set out how the tools both organisations have developed to help others carry out similar work to enable social value factors to become a more integrated part of decision-making in land development.

This is a work in progress. Through engagement with the market, we will continue to refine our tools to reflect users needs. We very much hope you will work with us.



An Evidence-Based Approach To Understanding Social Value Outcomes

Quality of life, health and wellbeing are playing an increasingly important role in how we approach land development. Yet there is still a lot of confusion and lack of consensus about what is meant by 'social value' and how it can be used to inform decision-making on how we plan, develop and deliver homes, infrastructure and neighbourhoods fit for the future.

Since the enactment of the Public Services (Social Value) Act in 2012, we have seen numerous definitions and measures emerge, with the aim of driving certain behaviours and capturing and quantifying, often in financial terms, the impact of different activities on communities. Each of these has its place; what constitutes 'social value' differs depending on context and intended outcomes.

Through our work, we are not seeking to deliver the definitive measure of 'social value'. Instead, we are seeking to move the conversation forward, from discussing social value **outputs** (the number of apprenticeships delivered, or trees planted for example) to start looking at social value **outcomes** (improvements to quality of life) and how these can be measured over time.

We want to make it easier for local authorities, land promoters, developers and investors to understand the needs and aspirations of a community, and the impact that interventions in the built environment can have on people's health and wellbeing. This, in turn, will allow those stakeholders to make strategic decisions based on a community's needs, aspirations and wellbeing, and to measure the impacts of their decisions against those things.

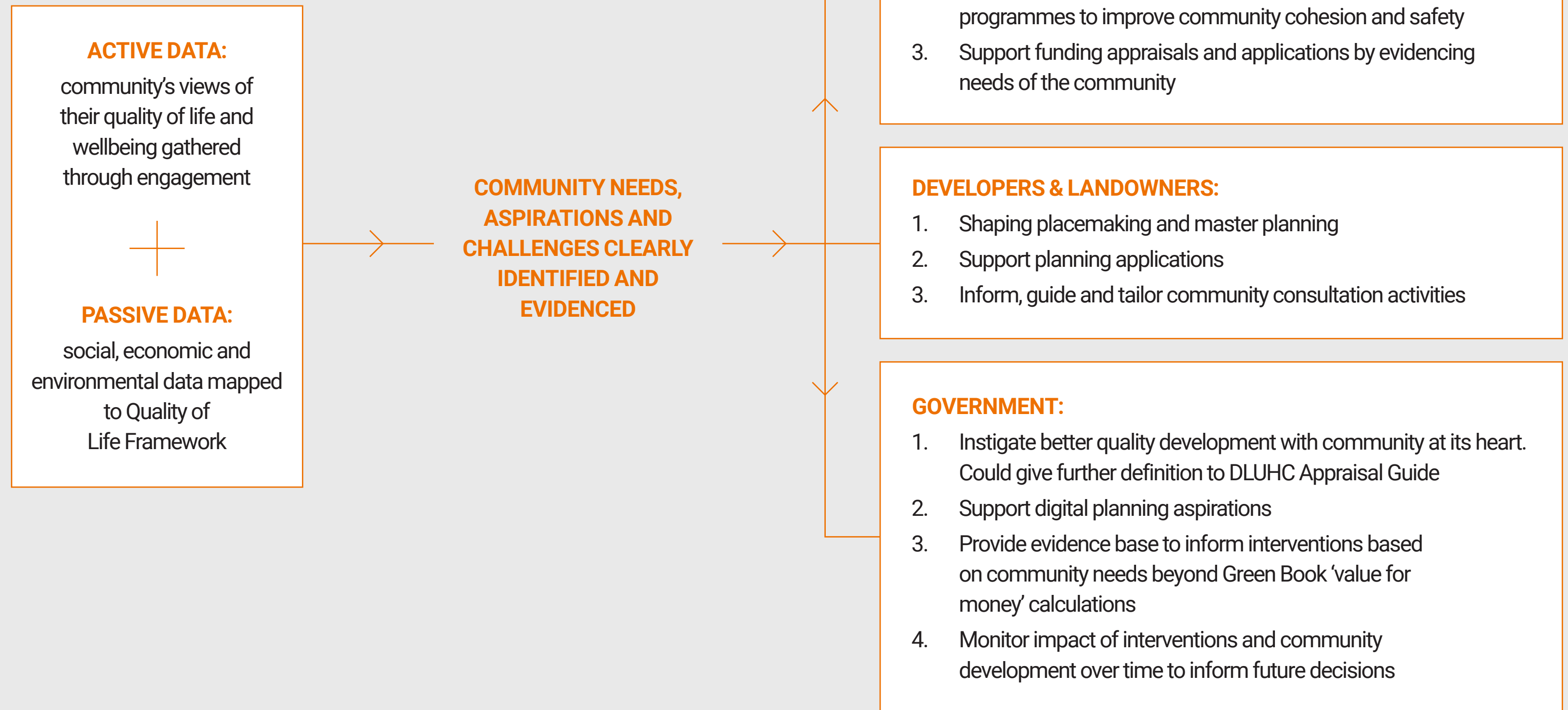
We believe that the best way to do this is by combining "passive" data that captures social, environmental and economic factors, with "active" data on what communities say about their needs and experiences, and then mapping this spatially across a development area and broader catchment.

This approach provides a straightforward and accessible way of pulling together and analysing a broad range of data at fairly granular level including safety, air quality, green infrastructure, health, education, transport, culture and demographics.

In doing so, it creates a baseline for social impact in an area, from which to measure improvement or decline over time, and on which to base decisions about the interventions that might be needed. It also brings greater visibility to issues which, by being difficult to quantify, are often overlooked in decision-making.

The graphic outlines how the data comes together and sets out how different stakeholders might apply these spatial maps to different challenges. For further detail on datasets and methodology, [please see p.15](#).

How to use the Better Places Approach



Case Study

Creating A Baseline For Social Impact In Harlow And Gilston

CLIENT:

Harlow & Gilston Garden Town

PROJECT TYPE:

Quality of Life Mapping

LOCATION:

Harlow and Gilston and the surrounding areas

TIMELINE:

April 2022-January 2023

FUNDING MECHANISM:

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities PropTech funding

THE CHALLENGE

Harlow and Gilston was designated as a garden town by the Department for Homes, Communities and Local Government in January 2017. The coming together of five councils with a common purpose was part of a new chapter for Harlow and its surrounding areas. In total, 16,000 new homes will be delivered by 2033, with a further 7,000 planned for the Gilston area to be built from 2033 onwards.

But how could [Harlow and Gilston Garden Town](#) - the partnership of local authorities - measure the impact of such a significant period of change, and involve local people in that process?



THE PROJECT

With [PropTech funding](#) from the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities, HGGT commissioned the Quality of Life Foundation to deliver 'Your quality of life' - a social value mapping and monitoring project via digital and in-person engagement across the Garden Town.

By working with expert partners - including Stantec - to build a clear picture of what people currently value, need and dislike in their local area, alongside socio-economic and environmental data, we were able to establish a quality of life baseline for the garden town area.

The baseline will be used to support master planning and stewardship arrangements for the Garden Town, and to shape strategies and delivery of development. It'll also enable monitoring of any changes to quality of life and social value in relation to the growth in the area.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO LIVE IN HARLOW?

HAVE YOUR SAY AND YOU COULD WIN £100 IN VOUCHERS

The Quality of Life Foundation is an independent research organisation. We provide a chance for the public to give feedback about their local area.

Get involved by taking part in the online survey and help shape future plans for your area!

Results will be shared with you, the residents, and your local authority. Any comments you leave will be anonymised.

If you'd prefer to complete a physical copy of the survey please visit the **Civic Centre in Harlow** or come find us at a local pop-up event.

Scan the QR code to take part or visit: qolmap.commonplace.is

QUALITY OF LIFE FOUNDATION | Commonplace | HGGT HARLOW & SUTTON GARDEN TOWN | Rainbow SERVICES | Stantec



WHAT WE DID

The Quality of Life Foundation worked with expert partners to carry out the Your Quality of Life project. Stantec were brought onboard for their expertise in data management, analysis and visualisation, alongside Commonplace to provide a digital engagement platform, and Rainbow Services, a local voluntary services organisation, to facilitate face-to-face engagement and reach otherwise under-represented groups.

Together, the Quality of Life Foundation and Stantec developed a practical, standardised approach to measuring and monitoring the constituent parts of social value in the built environment.

Using the [Quality of Life Framework](#) as the basis of the work, our overall approach was to collect, organise and spatially map existing socio-economic and environmental data alongside data gathered in an extensive engagement programme with local people. By combining these different types of data, we generated a baseline for social value in the area, based on both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

ORGANISING THE 'PASSIVE' DATA

Stantec collated, standardised and organised the socio-economic and environmental data, using open-source data sets to gather nationally comparable data covering the six themes of the Quality of Life Framework: control, health, nature, movement, wonder and community.

It was important that the scale of the places we could explore and understand through this data was at the most granular level possible. So, we selected the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA), an area equivalent to 1500 people/650 households. This is the smallest area at which data is nationally available across multiple domains, enabling us to work across local authority boundaries and to compare to national averages.

Stantec visualised each dataset spatially using GIS software. They did this at the LSOA level first, then transposed to a hex grid to mitigate the impact of boundaries and to provide a more intuitive representation of social value that ignores these administrative boundaries. The interactive map this generated could be explored spatially, by specific areas, by overall scores, by quality of life theme, sub-theme or by specific dataset.

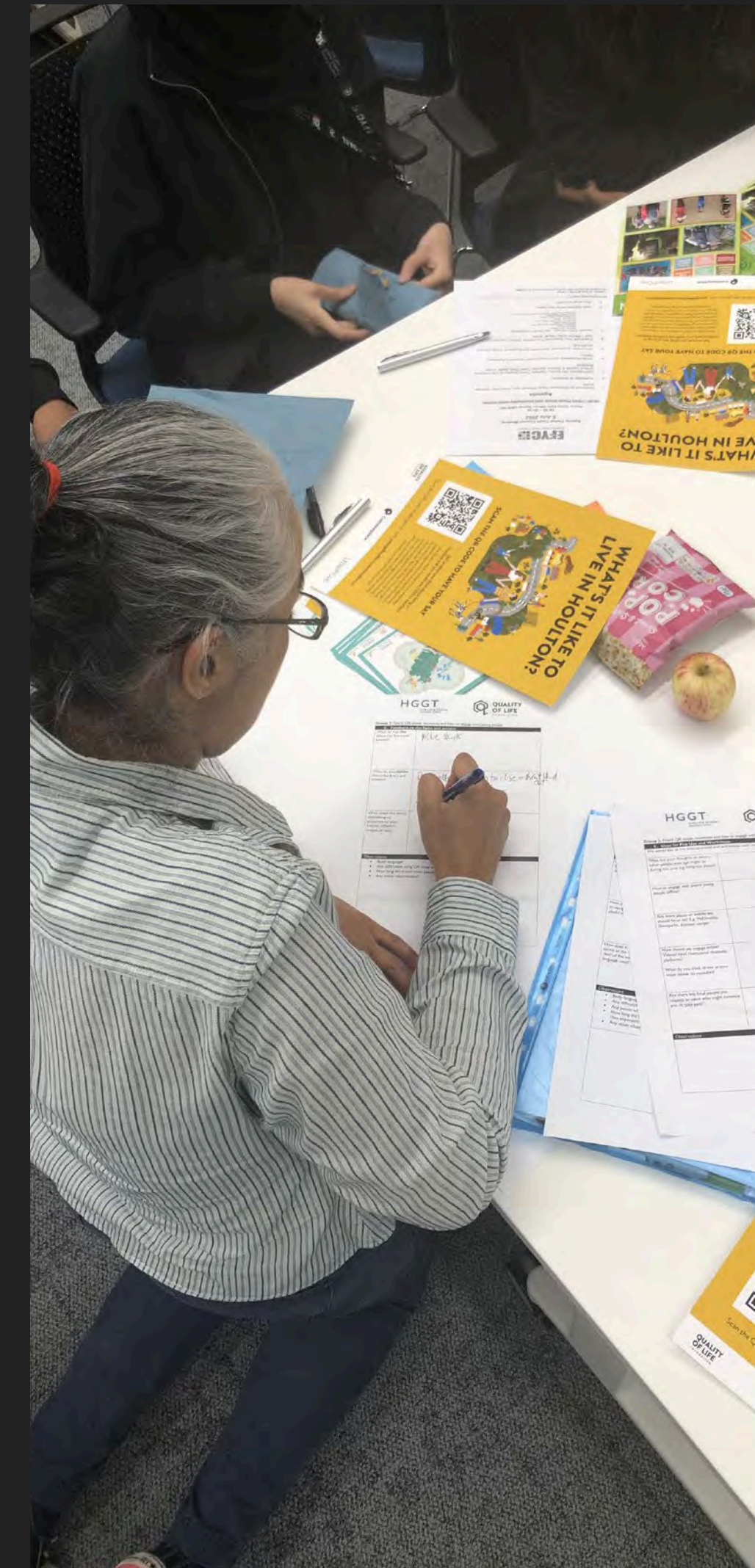
COLLECTING THE 'ACTIVE' DATA

Meanwhile, the Quality of Life Foundation designed and led a hybrid engagement programme, using digital and face-to-face methods to reach the different communities within Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding areas. This engagement also focused on the six themes of the Quality of Life Framework, providing consistency for the purposes of data analysis, but also a tool for engaging local people in conversations about their experiences of their local area.

The Quality of Life Foundation's engagement programme more than tripled the number of people taking part in conversations about their local area, compared to previous Garden Town consultations. It also increased participation from both younger people under 35 and those over 75, from people in ethnic minority communities, and from people who have a disability or long-term illness.

The Your quality of life consultation saw:

- 7,000 visitors to the [Your Quality of Life Commonplace platform](#)
- 1,015 contributions (contributions to the map and completion of surveys)
- 554 individual respondents
- 49 in-person pop-up events



THE OUTPUT

We combined and spatially mapped the data collected through both exercises and created a series of reports for the HGGT board and community, as well as for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

The final report - a Quality Monitoring Framework - will enable HGGT to measure the social impact of changes within the area on the people living there. Further DLUHC funding will see the creation of a dashboard that is accessible to both local authority officers and the public, so the data can be shared and used for the good of all.

We conducted correlation analysis of active data and passive data to test the relationship between our model and community responses. This enabled us to determine the effectiveness of passive data at modelling quality of life and adjust our confidence levels in the data accordingly. With repeated testing of this nature, we can improve the model with each iteration.

WHY WE DID IT

We can only design with community in mind when we understand what the community needs, which is why it is so important to understand those needs from the very beginning of a development process. We believe that part of that process must involve the input of those people living there, both for the knowledge acquired through lived experience and for the sense of influence or agency that it gives, enhancing people's health and wellbeing.

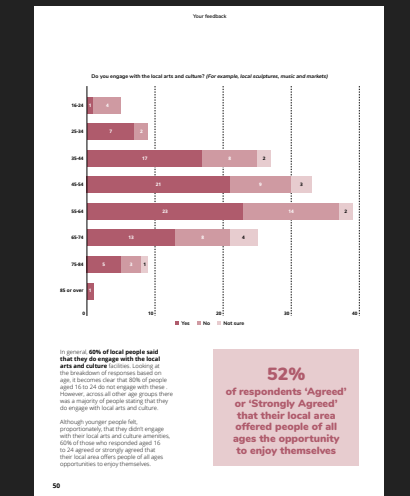
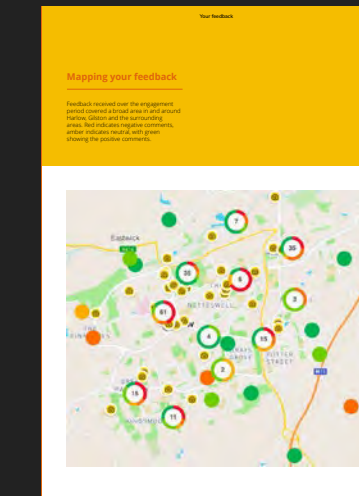
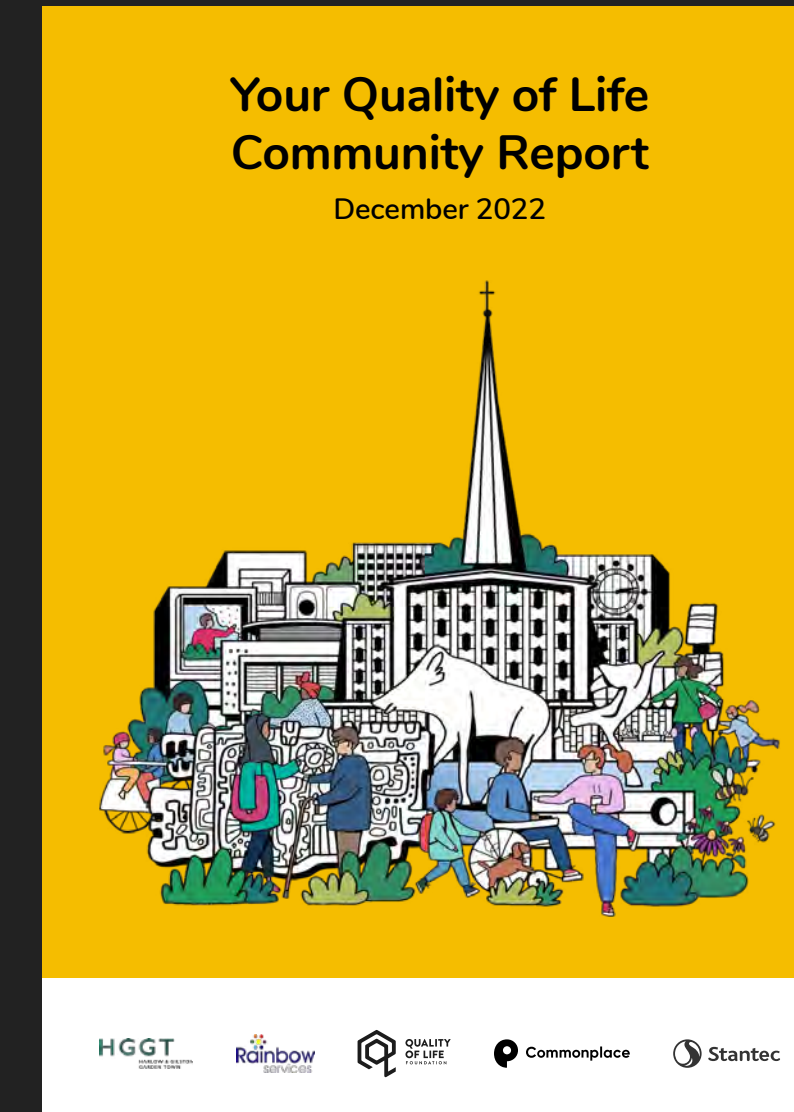
This project focused on people's quality of life in Harlow, Gilston and surrounding areas. It is part of ongoing efforts to ensure that the health and wellbeing of current and future residents is protected and promoted to the highest standard.

The key objectives of this project were to:

- Engage meaningfully, broadly and well with a cross-section of the population in Harlow, Gilston and the surrounding area
- Establish quality and social value data in a format usable by the local authority
- Develop a Quality Monitoring Framework
- Raise the profile of HGGT as a quality-driven project
- Contribute to best practice and lessons learned to scale up impact

By combining existing data about the local population with comments made by individuals through consultation, the five local authorities in the Garden Town area are now better placed to develop evidence-based interventions and to assess the impact of any changes that may occur over the coming years.

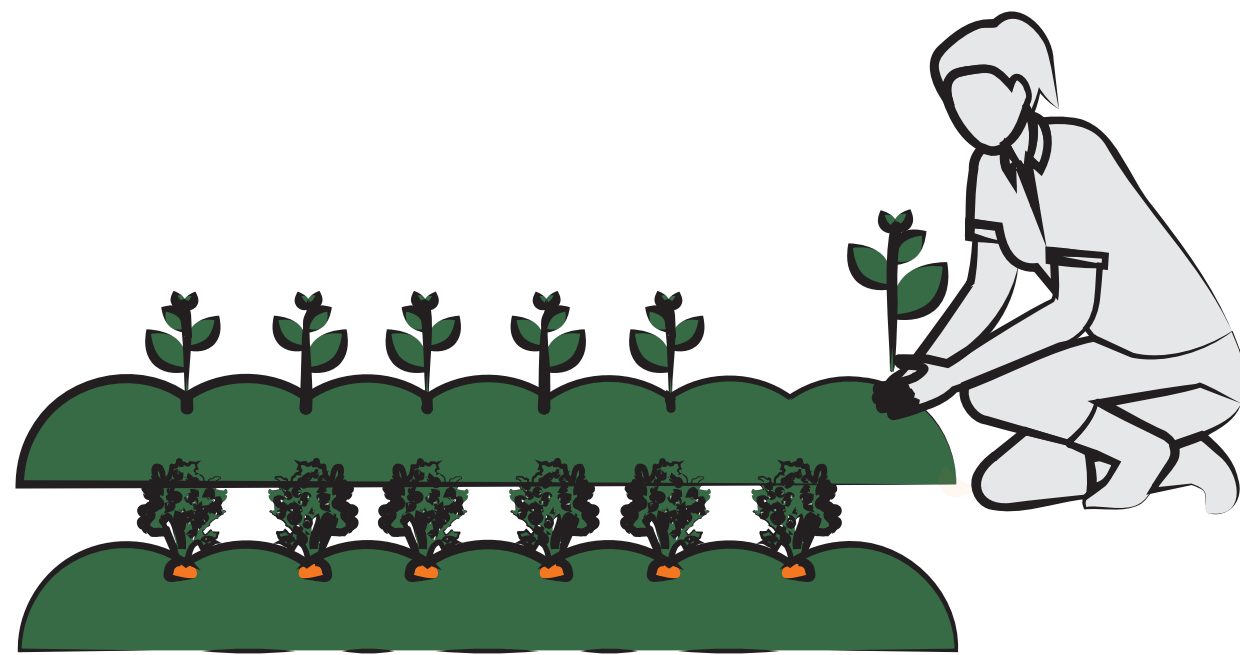
We hope this entire project – of collating quantitative and qualitative, passive and active data, arranging it in a way that can be understood, and later making it publicly accessible – provides a blueprint for other local authorities to ensure a more evidence-based and democratic approach to local decision-making.



Excerpts from the 'Your Quality of Life Community Report'. [View the full report here](#)

Lessons For Industry And Government

The project we carried out at Harlow and Gilston Garden Town provided an excellent test bed for the approach of combining 'active' and 'passive' data to create a baseline from which to measure the impact of change in a local area. But there is more work needed to maximise the potential of taking an evidence-base approach to social value.



The project showed the benefits of taking this joined-up approach to 'active' and 'passive' data about a community when it comes to making strategic decisions about an area.

BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- A spatial understanding of the quality of life in a place, including what the socio-economic conditions of a local population are, community assets and what people value or need
- An opportunity to tailor future consultations and focus on the areas that passive data cover adequately
- A baseline to measure the impact of interventions on an area, insight to support decisions on how and where best to focus resources and efforts, and a way of monitoring change over time
- A common repository that can be drawn upon by local authority officers, and the public, enabling more constructive dialogue about changes to a place, speeding up the creation of local plans
- Enabling developers and land promoters to quickly understand a community and their needs, to help inform development proposals, planning applications and design
- An understanding of relevant datasets and how to use them in a way that is robust, repeatable and scalable across other local authorities and developments in UK

WHAT WE NEED NOW:

- Recognition by government, local authorities and developers of the impact the built environment has on quality of life, and the role development can play to improve that
- Local government to take into account data informing the socio-economic determinants of health as well as sentiment analysis in decision-making about places
- Ongoing, inclusive and hybrid community engagement to harness local knowledge and supplement datasets
- For that data to be presented in an accessible and useable way to local authority officers and general public
- For the procurement process to look beyond social value "outputs" and include the means to measure and monitor social value "outcomes"
- For Government to include broader measures of social impact alongside the usual assessment of costs, benefits and risks when appraising interventions. The Better Places approach might provide a useful framework for capturing longer-term impacts that are not always monetised.
- Support from UK Government to ensure that local authorities can continue to develop programmes such as these across the UK, developing an approach that is both evidence-based and community-led.

Mapping Quality Of Life For Better Development Decisions

Matthew Morgan, Director at the Quality of Life Foundation



The [Quality of Life Foundation](#) helps local communities, professionals and policy makers to plan, design, create and care for homes and neighbourhoods in ways that will benefit people's health and wellbeing in the long term. We carry out independent research, engage communities, share evidence, and support organisations to implement best practice in their work. We do this because having a decent, affordable home in a safe, well-designed neighbourhood is the foundation of a happy, healthy life.



THE QUALITY OF LIFE FRAMEWORK

Through our work, we have gained a deep understanding of the elements that contribute to a person's quality of life, which we've summarised in our [Quality of Life Framework](#). It is this framework that we use to drive our approach to mapping social value. The Framework sets out six themes that are pertinent to defining a person's quality of life:



CONTROL

To have a sense of control we need to feel safe in all aspects of our lives, and stable in our homes, jobs and living situation. We also need to feel that we can influence our own circumstances in life and have a say over issues that affect us.



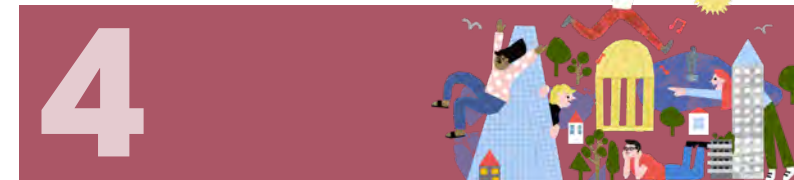
HEALTH

The places where we live and spend most of our time greatly affect our physical and mental health and wellbeing, which in turn impact our quality of life - as well as the health of the environment.



NATURE

Connections with nature and access to diverse green and water spaces are important to our sense of wellbeing. This includes spending time in natural environments, living in green neighbourhoods and near places such as parks and woodlands, as well as helping to create and care for them.



WONDER

When neighbourhoods offer a range of things to see and do, we may be delighted and surprised by new encounters that bring inspiration and a sense of wonder to our lives. Arts and culture as well as community pride and a sense of play have a key role to play in this.



MOVEMENT

What form of transport we choose has a direct impact on our health, the air we breathe and our carbon footprint, but also, more broadly, our access to opportunities.



COMMUNITY

There are many different ways someone can feel a sense of community. It's about whether you feel at home, how your area provides for diversity, or how it encourages social connections and a sense of neighbourliness. But it's also about neighbourhood design and what services and facilities people can access.



The Quality of Life Framework was the mechanism used to organise and map the passive and the active data in the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town project. It helped local stakeholders to understand the complex, inter-related needs of the local community and what might need to change for health and wellbeing outcomes to improve.

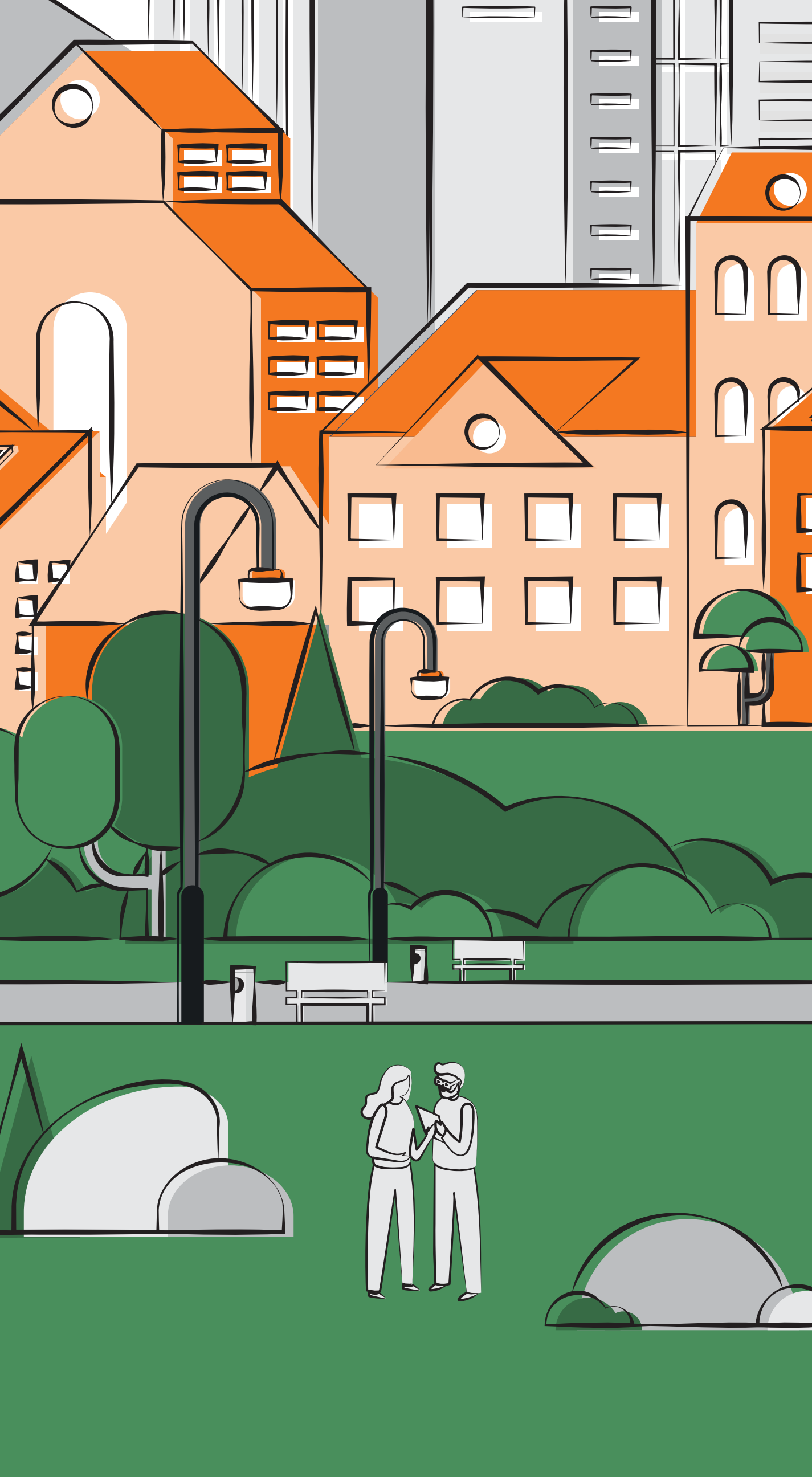
Using the Framework as a lens through which to analyse and map data about their residents' quality of life can help local authorities and developers to shape their spatial and design strategies in ways that centre on improving health and wellbeing outcomes. The Framework can also act as an important tool for talking with communities - engaging them in conversations about their local area in a way that they understand, but also in a way where the findings of engagement can be mapped and measured over time.

Importantly, the Framework can also help stakeholders to communicate their plans in a way that makes sense to the community.

It is this approach – of building an evidence base, then applying and communicating it – that lies at the heart of the work we do.

Quality of Life Mapping is an intensive research and engagement programme for local authorities, developers, housing associations and local communities. It provides evidence to inform spatial strategies and to measure the impact of health and wellbeing interventions on an area.

For more information visit www.qolf.org/what-we-do/quality-of-life-mapping or email matthew@qolf.org



Making Better Decisions With The Better Places Tool

Juliet Clark, Senior Associate – Health and Social Value at Stantec



The Better Places approach is the result of a two-year Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnership between Stantec and University of Reading with the aim of providing a tool that facilitates the inclusion of broader social value factors in decision-making around land development. It has been developed with the intention to fill a gap in the many different approaches, frameworks and mechanisms that have emerged in the social value arena.

As such, it is not intended to replace other measures but to complement them by capturing a broad range of data that reflect the multitude of factors that contribute to people's quality of life.

Working with our partners, we have developed an approach that combines and spatially maps existing 'passive' data with 'active' data, gathered through community engagement, to enable local authorities, developers, landowners and government to better understand communities, create a baseline and track change over time.

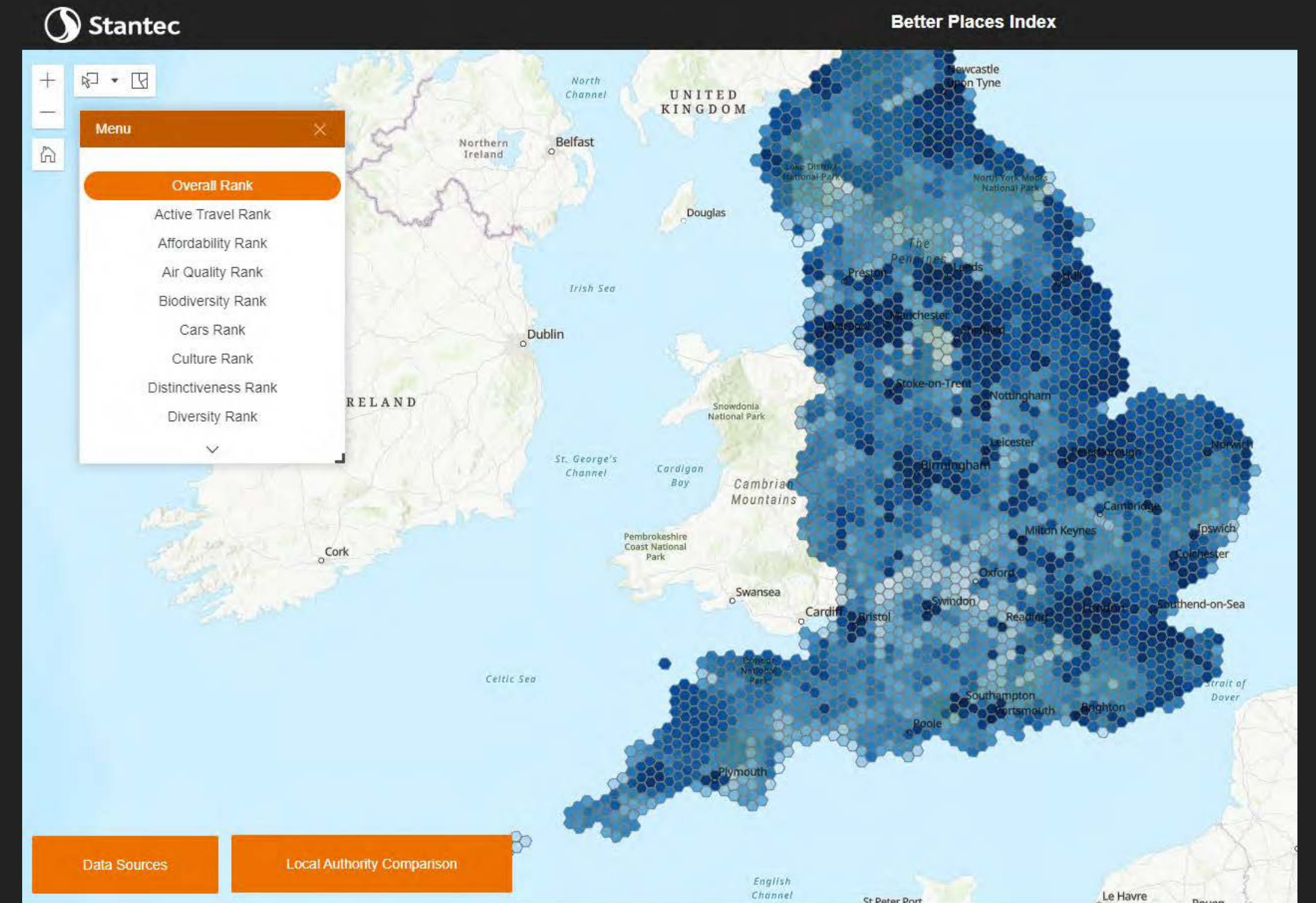
BUILDING THE BETTER PLACES TOOL

We've already described in the Case Study (p.7), how we worked with the Quality of Life Foundation to apply the Better Places approach across the five councils delivering Harlow and Gilston Garden Town. Here we explain how we built on the methodology to develop a digital tool that enables us to apply the approach in a robust, consistent and repeatable way across all neighbourhoods in England.

The Better Places tool collates, indexes and spatially-maps 'passive data' using GIS software. It provides a visual, quick and easy way to create a baseline of local context, analyse areas down to neighbourhood level and measure change.

Using the same hex grid approach that we developed through the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town work with Quality of Life Foundation, we have built an interactive map of the whole of England that can be explored spatially, by specific areas, by overall scores, by quality of life theme, sub-theme or by specific dataset.

By enabling us to rapidly analyse and visualise the data, we can help local authorities, developers, landowners and investors to understand the character, resilience, and socio-economic profile of communities and to develop an evidence-based approach to community-focused planning and placemaking.



| Data Name | Better Places Group | QoLF Theme |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Income after Housing Costs | Affordability | Control |
| Barriers to Housing and Services (Indices of Multiple Deprivation) | Affordability | Control |
| Tenure | Affordability | Control |
| Housing Affordability Ratio | Affordability | Control |
| Internet user classification | Influence | Control |
| Social Grade | Influence | Control |
| Voter Turnout | Influence | Control |
| Highest Level of Qualifications | Influence | Control |
| Occupation | Influence | Control |
| Crime | Safety | Control |
| Ethnicity | Diversity | Community |
| Gender | Diversity | Community |
| School Capacity Difference | Opportunity | Community |
| Claimant Count | Opportunity | Community |
| Highest Level of Qualifications | Opportunity | Community |
| Number of Jobs | Opportunity | Community |
| Unemployment Count | Opportunity | Community |
| Proximity to Healthy Assets | Lifestyle | Health |
| Proximity to Healthy Hazards | Lifestyle | Health |
| Long-term Health Problem | Lifestyle | Health |
| Health Deprivation and Disability | Lifestyle | Health |
| Health Rating | Lifestyle | Health |
| Dwelling Type | Housing | Health |
| Household Occupancy Rating | Housing | Health |
| Private Garden Space | Housing | Health |
| Ambient Air Quality | Air Quality | Health |
| Public Rights of Way Density | Active Travel | Movement |
| National Cycle Network | Active Travel | Movement |
| Public Transport Stops | Public Transport | Movement |
| Bus Service Frequency | Public Transport | Movement |
| Commuting Patterns by Mode | Cars | Movement |
| Traffic Delay | Cars | Movement |
| Proximity to Green Space | Green Space | Nature |
| Private Garden Space | Green Space | Nature |
| Proximity to Green Space | Biodiversity | Nature |
| Biodiversity Designations | Biodiversity | Nature |
| Private Garden Space | Biodiversity | Nature |
| Culture Facilities | Culture | Wonder |
| Listed Building Density | Disinctiveness | Wonder |
| Proximity to Green Space | Playfulness | Wonder |

The Better Places tool was built through Stantec’s internal innovation programme led by our [Global Innovation Office](#), which brought together our data analysts, GIS experts and social value team. The team started by mapping English datasets, but as this work progresses, we will be looking to expand the tool to cover Wales and Scotland, using datasets relevant to those devolved administration. We will also continue to update, develop and improve the tool based on what we learn from future projects and feedback from stakeholders.

Behind the accessible visualisations and maps, is an index built from over 40 datasets mapped to Quality of Life Framework including safety, air quality, green infrastructure, health, education, transport and demographics. We selected data that is robust, publicly available, updated and available at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) - an area equivalent to 1500 people/650 households.

This is the smallest area at which data is nationally available across multiple domains, enabling us to work across local authority boundaries and to compare to national averages.

The data was then processed with each dataset/variable standardized and then grouped and organised into 10 to give a score out of 10. These scores (1-10) can be viewed by individual dataset/variable, sub theme, theme, and overall score.

It is important to emphasise that the tool delivers half of the Better Places approach. Meaningful community engagement to gather timely ‘active’ data capturing people’s sentiment about their built environment and quality of life is essential for a rounded picture.

However, the ability to bring together credible, open-source and accessible data to create a picture of communities across England is a step-change in social value.

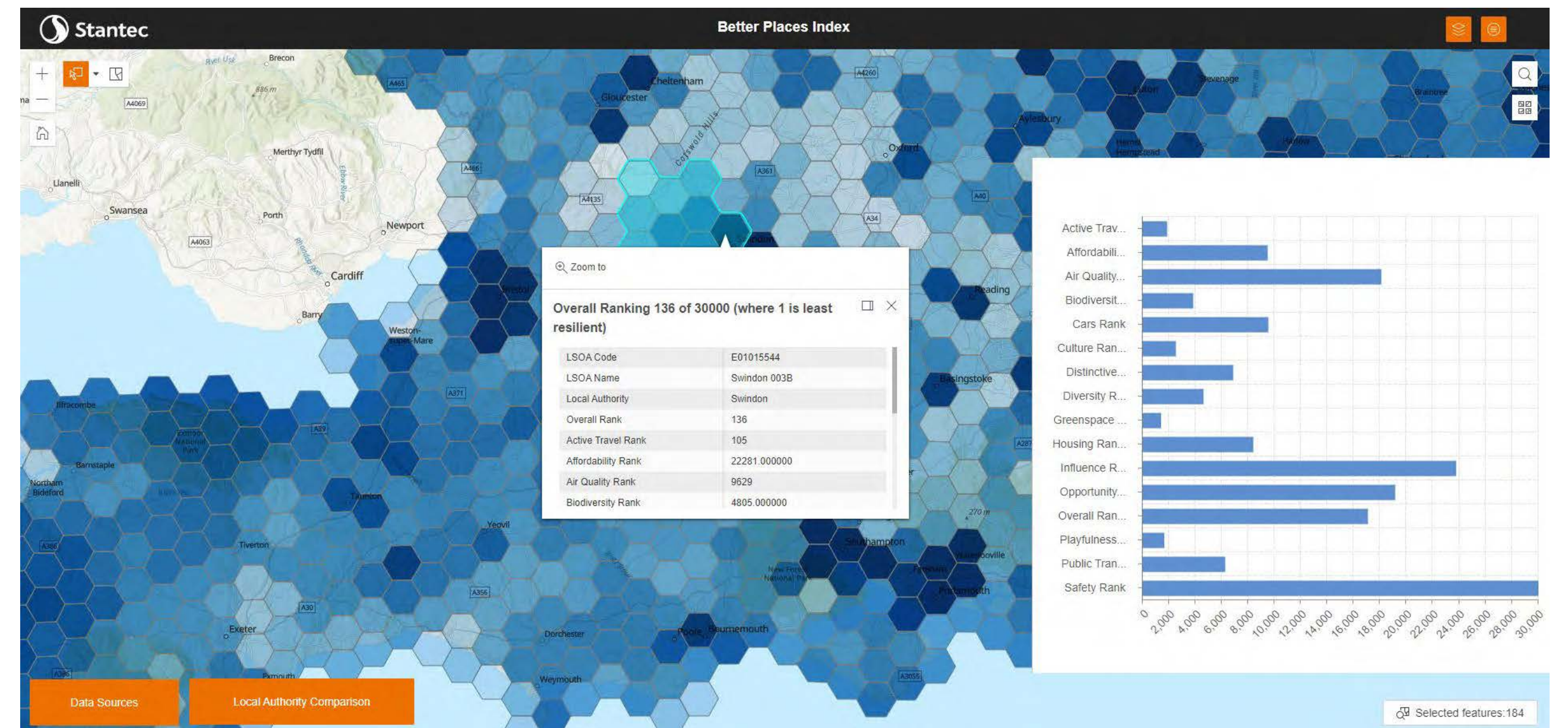
USING THE BETTER PLACES TOOL

The tool is designed to give users fast and easy access to numerous datasets mapped across relevant geographies. The spatial mapping is intended to support more holistic decision-making around land development in a number of ways. This might include:

- Inform, guide and tailor community consultation and engagement activities
- The development and iteration of Local Plans or Area Visions for a place
- Defining community needs and hence interventions, these could be physical such as improving connectivity, quality greenspace, community facilities or programmes to improve community cohesion and safety.
- Supporting the development of strategic sites by integrating and meeting the needs of the local community
- Monitoring the impact of interventions and community development activities over time
- Identify topics that merit more detailed investigation and analysis
- Supporting funding appraisals by demonstrating the needs of a community

The Better Places Tool provides us and our clients with a robust evidence base of local needs. Replicability and transparency are core to this offer and are often elements which are missing when communicating benefits of new development with communities and stakeholders. At Stantec, our Health and Social Value team combine the Better Places evidence base with our wider health and social value expertise to create a rounded, justified approach to wellbeing in design.

For more information visit our website www.stantec.com/uk/ideas/spotlight/market/better-places





MATTHEW MORGAN

DIRECTOR -
QUALITY OF LIFE FOUNDATION

[0204 548 3866](tel:02045483866)

MATTHEW@QOLF.ORG



JULIET CLARK

SENIOR ASSOCIATE -
HEALTH AND SOCIAL VALUE

JULIET.CLARK@STANTEC.COM



ANDY PORTER

HEAD OF INNOVATION & DIGITAL
(INFRASTRUCTURE & BUILDINGS)

ANDY.PORTER@STANTEC.COM



CHRIS MOORE

PRINCIPAL GIS CONSULTANT

CHRIS.MOORE@STANTEC.COM

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