Pride in Place — Bentilee & Ubberley Neighbourhood Board

Meeting: Pride in Place, Bentilee & Ubberley Neighbourhood Board Meeting 3
Date: 03/09/26
Time: 4.00pm
Location: Discovery Academy, Discovery Drive, Bentilee
Co-Chairs: Amy Harris & Simon French
Minute Taker: Waqas Butt

Attendees

Board

Amy Harris – Co-Chair

Simon French – Co-Chair

Gareth Snell MP

Cllr Sarah Jane Colclough

Steve Adams

Sha Owusu

Mereoni Jegesa

Others

Vicki Gwynne – Local Authority Accountable Body representative

Nicola Brown – Office of Gareth Snell MP

Cassie Weaver – Partnerships & Collaborations Lead, VAST

Waqas Butt – Pride in Place Coordinator

Nicola Brown – Office of Gareth Snell MP

Apologies

Tracey Johnson (EPIC Housing)

Cllr Lynn Watkins

Donna Firman

Andrew Firman

Lee Jones Jr (Ten Count Boxing CIO)

Summary of Decisions

The decisions taken at this meeting are set out below. Supporting discussion is recorded against the relevant agenda item.

D1. Minutes of Meeting 2 approved as an accurate record, subject to a correction of attribution on one item. No further matters arising.

D2. Financial reporting confirmed as a standing item, provided at each meeting. The first report was tabled at this meeting.

D3. Board papers, draft minutes and approved minutes to be published on the VAST website within ten working days of each meeting, transferring to the dedicated project website once live. MHCLG has confirmed this arrangement is acceptable in the interim.

D4. Website Gold package approved from The Discovery Academy. Put to a vote and carried, at approximately £55 per month including five hours of monthly support. Simon French withdrew from the room for the discussion and vote.

D5. A local logo agreed to proceed alongside Pride in Place branding, following MHCLG confirmation that this is permitted. The design is to be a standard shape that community groups can adapt.

D6. Branded materials banners, name badges, clothing and small giveaway items agreed to be ordered once the logo is finalised, on the basis that the cost is low.

D7. Small grants for residents to be developed as a distinct process, separate from the engagement programme. Cassie Weaver to work with Steve Adams on a system and process for approval at the next meeting. Andy to design a application form for Small projects (under £10,000).

D8. Quick wins to be brought forward as a costed menu for decision at the next meeting. Board members to submit suggestions to Cassie Weaver by Tuesday 8 September. Each proposal to follow a project initiation format setting out title, description, cost, timescale, intended impact and the evidence supporting it.

D9. Next meeting to be run in two parts: Board business first, followed by community organisations in smaller breakout groups rather than a plenary session.

Agenda

1. Welcome, Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of Meeting 2 were agreed as an accurate record, subject to one correction: an item recorded as raised by Vicki Gwynne was in fact raised by a Board member. No other matters arising.

2. Publication Requirements

MHCLG has confirmed that all published documentation must be available on a website. Until the dedicated project site is live, material will be published on the VAST website. Draft and approved minutes are required within ten working days of

each meeting. The Board noted that pen portraits and full Board details are less pressing than the minutes, allowances and formal papers.

3. Policies Update

A meeting was scheduled for Friday 4 September between Cassie Weaver, Tracey Johnson and VAST to build the policy suite and a scheme of delegation, for presentation at the next meeting.

4. Finance and the Ten-Year Funding Profile

Vicki Gwynne presented the full ten-year funding profile, largely unchanged from previous discussion. The parameters are as follows.

Parameter	Detail
Investment periods	Three periods across the ten years: four years, then three years, then three years. The first period is four years, which is why the regeneration plan must cover four years.
Minimum spend	At least 25% of the cumulative allocation must be spent within each investment period.
Mid-point threshold	At least 50% of the total allocation must be spent by the end of year 7 (2032/33).
Roll-forward	Underspend may be carried into the following financial year. Funding cannot be drawn down from future years the mechanism operates one way only.
Reporting	An expenditure report is required every six months. October will be light touch; the April return must be a credible account of spend and forward commitments.
Beyond 2028/29	Funding after financial year 2028/29 is subject to the next spending review.

On current spend: the £150,000 capacity allocation has been committed, with a breakdown of VAST spend to the end of August provided by Lisa. £4,500 has been drawn from the £273,000 revenue allocation, covering a proportion of SOTCC resource since April. Work undertaken before April 2026 was absorbed rather than charged to the programme. No capital has been spent.

A Board member asked how the amount payable to Stoke-on-Trent City Council had been determined. Vicki Gwynne explained that this was agreed through the working groups with MHCLG before the Boards were established, and that the figure reflects the minimum for work already undertaken rather than the 10–15% overhead or management fee that would be typical. Government guidance permits a local authority to recover the additional burden of the programme.

A further request is anticipated to cover legal, procurement and finance support across all three Boards. The Section 151 Officer is to advise on a fair amount. The Board sought and received clarification that any such request will be brought to the Board for discussion rather than determined unilaterally.

5. Small Grant Funding

Cassie Weaver has drafted an application form covering organisation type, safeguarding arrangements for work with children, young people and vulnerable adults, planned activity, intended reach and reporting. Guidelines and criteria are in development. The form was initially scoped for community engagement activity but can be broadened to on-the-ground improvement work.

The Board discussed eligibility. Known Bentilee organisations would be approached first, with the opportunity then opened more widely to organisations working in or closely connected to the area but not necessarily based there. A question was raised as to whether the fund should be limited to the voluntary and community sector or extended to businesses.

Steve Adams identified an opportunity not usually available in grant funding: organisations without a proven track record are ordinarily excluded, but the local focus of this programme allows informal groups of residents with good ideas to be supported, with an established organisation acting as accountable body to provide assurance. He cautioned that a recognised set of organisations will pursue available funding, and that while they may deliver value, the primary focus can become the money rather than the need. He advised that a stronger locality emphasis would produce better local buy-in than awarding to organisations already operating at scale.

On process, Steve Adams advised that due diligence checking accounts, income and expenditure, and governance documents can be completed and funds released within approximately four weeks. Where an applicant seeks more than they have previously managed, staged payments or an accountable body arrangement can be used. He cautioned against making the process so rigorous that small groups working within a few streets are excluded.

Concern was expressed that opening the fund to engagement activity could dilute the Board's engagement strategy and that the timescales are better suited to community projects. Gareth Snell MP proposed that the two strands are complementary: a small programme of quick wins funded now serves as proof of concept for larger delivery, while consultation will surface further items that can be actioned immediately rather than held for the longer work programme. This demonstrates that participation produces results and builds goodwill for items that necessarily take longer.

It was agreed that the small grants process should be developed for residents and local groups, with Cassie Weaver and Steve Adams to bring a system and process to the next meeting.

6. Quick Wins

The Board reiterated that quick wins are intended to demonstrate visible progress and build credibility while the four-year plan is developed. Suggestions raised were:

- Three areas of open space around the Neighbourhood Centre: the land behind St Stephen's Church where the former health centre stood, the space in front of the Neighbourhood Centre used for the St Stephen's music event, and a third green. All have been undeveloped for a considerable period. Hard surfacing was suggested to allow outdoor events and provide seating, with the potential to grow the scheme over time.
- Two small grass areas at Trowbridge Crescent and Aylesbury Road, where residents have raised the condition of the land and want something in place that is easily maintained.
- A winter collection of bulky items, potentially in partnership with Bentilee Volunteers, who already handle reusable goods.
- Skip or bin lorry provision on a street-by-street basis. Vicki Gwynne advised a council price could be obtained quickly and noted that the challenge is communication residents need to know when collection will reach their street, and timings must account for those at work.
- Additional litter and recycling bins carrying the local logo.

Simon proposed that each quick win be presented as a project initiation document setting out the title and description, cost, likely timescale, intended impact and, importantly, the evidence for why it has been put forward, including where it has come from engagement or conversations with residents, and a quotation where possible. This builds a "you said, we did" record from the outset.

Steve Adams raised two points. First, that local Facebook groups represent a substantial audience, three groups identified with approximately 10,900, 9,000 and 1,400 members and that content should be seeded there. He read a recent resident post describing frustration with anti-social behaviour, illegal bikes, litter and drug dealing as indicative of sentiment in those groups. Second, that anything delivered must carry visible signage identifying it as a Pride in Place project, including temporary signage for short-term activity such as skips.

The Board noted the need to avoid creating disproportionate infrastructure around low-value items, while retaining sufficient detail, cost and rationale, to make a sound decision. Nicola Brown proposed a submission deadline of Tuesday 8 September to allow collation ahead of the next meeting.

Awareness was raised as a concern. At a staff meeting at Maple Court, a good proportion of those present live in the community and only one had heard of Pride in Place.

7. Letter to Residents

Amy Harris presented the draft letter, substantially shortened from the original. It introduces the Co-Chair and the Board as people who live in, work in and care about the community, explains the £20 million government funding and that decisions will be made locally rather than for the area, and introduces the programme name "Our Bentilee, Our Future". It introduces the survey, with a QR code and a physical copy attached, and offers collection of completed paper surveys for anyone who would struggle to return one.

The Board suggested adding reference to the small grants fund and a link to the website once live. Distribution is proposed via Royal Mail, with additional copies for receptions including schools and the housing association. The format proposed is an A4 fold-out booklet with a tear-off return section, in large print for accessibility.

Cllr Colclough offered the existing post box at the Neighbourhood Centre for rebranding, noting that the PFI arrangement does not permit permanent placement and that the box is locked away outside reception hours, though the centre remains open until 8pm and returns can be left at reception. A library drop box was suggested as an alternative.

Concern was raised about sustaining resident interest once the letter generates enthusiasm, and whether a regular mechanism exists for people to come together, potentially as an addition to the community lounge, or a volunteer working group. It was also noted that residents who work are not reached by daytime activity and that evening and weekend provision is required.

The Board noted that a proportion of residents, particularly older residents, will not use a website or social media, and that physical communication must continue alongside digital channels for significant announcements.

8. Engagement Update

Waqas Butt reported on activity since the last meeting, including a community walk and the Seeds of Change event at St Stephen's Church. The engagement dashboard records 180 conversations to date, with named individuals recorded where residents have chosen to give their details.

Activity confirmed or in progress:

- Food with a Friend — still developing following conversations with a Jericho volunteer supporting a food bank, alongside St Stephen's Community Church. The proposal is for cooking groups in which one member cooks for

the group each week, providing a relaxed setting for conversation. Tracey Johnson at EPIC Housing is supportive.

- Introductory session held with Discovery Academy and Maple Court, with a follow-up meeting on Friday to agree how both academies can support engagement. Both will attend the next meeting.
- Engagement at school gates and outside businesses, with agreement from Heron Foods and Premier to have a presence outside their premises.
- Meeting arranged with Matt Crowe of Transform Communities, who runs a weekly youth and family engagement event at the Neighbourhood Centre and has supported engagement in another Pride in Place area. He is a potential engagement champion.
- Attendance at Big Brew Time with The Bread and Butter Thing, which provides surplus food at low cost, to speak with residents and discuss the food initiative. A director of EPIC Housing will attend.
- A community litter pick next week.
- A community meal, to be scheduled as the culmination of the engagement period, drawing together the groups and organisations engaged throughout.

The Board discussed how members could contribute directly. It was suggested that Board members lead or co-lead walks and litter picks at weekends, and that a regular presence at the Tuesday market, a "meet the Board" stand with an ideas board — would reach residents who do not attend organised events. A gazebo and table will be required.

Nicola Brown suggested linking a litter pick to a school so that children carry the invitation home to parents, with pull-up banners and refreshments to make it a launch event rather than a routine activity.

On locations, it was noted that the estate is not uniformly affected and that the edges of the estate and the walkway between Trowbridge Crescent and Twigg Street are the areas that get overlooked. A resident, a former social worker, has offered to mobilise others and to talk to people about Pride in Place. Approximately 40 litter pickers are available.

Coordination will be through the Board WhatsApp group, with Waqas Butt providing sufficient notice of activity.

It was noted that a community picnic format — residents bringing food and blankets — would allow different cultures and cuisines to be represented and would address the isolation and "we don't know our neighbours" theme emerging from conversations.

9. Website and Logo

MHCLG has confirmed there is no issue with using a local logo provided Pride in Place branding also appears, and an example from another area was cited. Faye is developing a design based on earlier discussion: a standard shape that different parts of the community can adapt to make their own, with artwork displayed at events.

On the website, Cyber Kiln was approached and has not responded. The team at PIA responded promptly and has provided a package. Proposed pages are: home; about, covering the funding and why areas were selected; project area, covering Bentilee and the boundaries; meet the Board; upcoming events; documents, carrying policies and the reporting required for transparency; opportunities to engage and volunteer; a celebration or news section; and a feedback form.

The Board considered the pricing options. The bronze package is approximately £600 as a one-off with ongoing updates falling to the Board; the gold package is approximately £55 per month and includes five hours of support per month. The view expressed was that the website should be treated as an investment rather than a cost, as it will be the first point of contact for most residents and the focal point for social media. Simon French withdrew from the room and the gold package was put to a vote and carried.

Delivery is estimated at approximately six weeks. The landing page and events page are to be prioritised, with the remainder following, and compliance requirements transferred promptly.

Once the logo is finalised, the Board agreed to order banners, name badges for use in the community, clothing, and small items including pens, keyrings, stickers and fridge magnets. Flags carrying designs by local schoolchildren were discussed, with a competition on what children value about Bentilee and what they want its future to look like; the length of run along Dividy Road is subject to cost. Paid Facebook advertising and promoted posts were suggested once the website is live.

10. Survey

Waqas Butt presented the draft survey. It opens with an "about you" section establishing the respondent's connection to the area and postcode, followed by a scaled question on how people feel about the area, a top-three priorities question, a question on what prevents residents using existing provision, a question on whether residents have been consulted before and whether anything changed, a branching question on getting involved, a free-text section, and a prize draw.

A response rate of approximately 5% was cited as a reasonable expectation, and it was noted that repeating the survey after quick wins are delivered would

provide a measure of change. A winter hamper was suggested as the prize, with contributions from Board members.

Comments from the Board:

- The survey should be shortened, or a shorter version used, where it is being completed in busy settings such as a hall. It was confirmed that a shorter version exists for in-person interactions.
- A version adapted for primary age should be developed with school leads, potentially using art rather than a written format.
- Children outside the Alpha academies must be included. Children not in education remain the greatest challenge; Alice Charity and family engagement officers were identified as possible routes.
- Response options of "don't know" and "prefer not to say" tend to be selected as the easiest option and should be reviewed.
- Capturing responses from outside Bentilee postcodes would allow comparison of perception between residents and non-residents.

On community safety, it was noted that resident perception of crime and anti-social behaviour differs considerably from recorded figures, and that fear is often rooted in incidents some years old. Power BI reports were suggested to give the Board an accurate picture, and publishing actual crime data on the website was proposed so residents can see the position.

The engagement dashboard was demonstrated. Children and young people is currently the highest-scoring theme, followed by volunteering and community spirit, green parks and spaces, and community safety and anti-social behaviour. The dashboard updates live. The Board agreed that time should be set aside at a future meeting to review the engagement data and survey results together, so that they inform the four-year plan, and that this data should also be used to test whether grant applications align with what residents have said.

11. Next Meeting Format and Community Organisations

Confirmed attendance: Bentilee Volunteers, Matt Crowe (Transform Communities), Ann Marie (St Stephen's Church), Tracey Johnson (EPIC Housing) and both Alpha academies. Awaiting confirmation: Ulysses Youth and Family Hub, Thrive at 5. Bev Lawton and the Scouts. Staffordshire Police were suggested as an addition, given their Build programme and a student engagement requirement attached to their funding, which may present an opportunity for overlap.

Organisations have been briefed to come prepared to discuss what they currently do to engage the community and how they can assist, rather than to deliver formal presentations.

Given the number attending, it was agreed to run the meeting in two parts: Board business first, covering the quick wins and small grants process, followed by community organisations. Rather than each organisation presenting to the full Board, smaller groups were preferred — several organisations compete for the same funding streams and are unlikely to speak openly in front of one another. Cassie Weaver will coordinate rooms once numbers are confirmed. An alternative of a separate subgroup meeting the day before was discussed but not pursued, as attendees have already committed to the date and time.

It was noted that the Board should retain oversight so that organisations do not proceed in different directions, and that activity should align with the wider engagement strategy.

The next meeting coincides with the Discovery Academy open evening, which presents an opportunity for a stand with a pull-up banner, QR code and interactive maps. A half-day workshop bringing together health and wellbeing activity in Bentilee, including the ICB, was proposed for late September.

12. Any Other Business

- A suite of demographic and deprivation data for the area has been provided by the council and will be uploaded to the shared folder, replacing the earlier version.
- A BEAT event is scheduled at Bentilee PCN, with over-40s invited. It is expected to be well attended, including by people from outside Bentilee, and will be used as an engagement opportunity. Vicki Gwynne will introduce Waqas Butt to the relevant police contacts.
- The Making Great Places police survey for Bentilee is open. Results will be shared with the Board and Board members were asked to complete and circulate it.
- Technical difficulties affected the meeting. It was agreed that presenters should arrive 20 minutes early for the next meeting to allow set-up. Note-taking arrangements will be required for breakout groups.

Actions and Next Steps

Meeting Date	Action	Owner	Progress
03/09/26	Submit quick win suggestions to Cassie for collation.	All Board members	Deadline Tue 08/09/26
03/09/26	Prepare a costed menu of quick win projects — title, description, rationale and evidence, cost, timescale and intended impact — for decision.	Cassie Weaver / Waqas Butt	For next meeting

Meeting Date	Action	Owner	Progress
03/09/26	Submit a written business case for the three green spaces around the Neighbourhood Centre.	Cllr Colclough	By Fri 11/09/26
03/09/26	Develop the small grants system and process, including eligibility, due diligence and accountable body arrangements for informal groups.	VAST / Steve Adams	For approval next meeting
03/09/26	Obtain indicative council costs for a bulky waste collection / skip provision.	VAST / Council	Available on request
03/09/26	Present the policy suite and scheme of delegation to the Board.	Cassie Weaver / Tracey Johnson / VAST	Meeting held 04/09/26; for next meeting
03/09/26	Commission the website Gold package and prioritise the landing and events pages.	Cassie Weaver / VAST	Approved; approx. 6 weeks
03/09/26	Finalise the logo and place orders for banners, name badges and branded items.	Cassie Weaver / Faye	In progress
03/09/26	Publish draft and formal minutes on the VAST website within 10 working days, pending the new site.	VAST	Ongoing requirement
03/09/26	Finalise the resident letter and survey and arrange distribution to all households.	Amy Harris / VAST Communications	Following branding
03/09/26	Review survey wording — response options, question order and a version suitable for primary age.	Waqas Butt / school leads	Before distribution
03/09/26	Confirm attendance and format for community organisations at the next meeting, including breakout arrangements.	Waqas Butt / Cassie Weaver	For next meeting
03/09/26	Upload the council demographic and deprivation data suite to the shared folder, replacing the earlier version.	Cassie Weaver	To action
03/09/26	Introduce Waqas to the relevant Staffordshire Police contacts for the BEAT event and Making Great Places.	Vicki Gwynne	To action

Meeting Date	Action	Owner	Progress
03/09/26	Arrange IT set-up 20 minutes ahead of the next meeting for all presenters.	VAST / Discovery Academy	For next meeting

Date of Next Meeting

Date: Thursday 17th September
Time: [To be confirmed]
Venue: Discovery Academy — larger room

Meeting Close

The Board noted that considerable work had taken place between meetings and that the programme had moved forward. Thanks were recorded to VAST for its contribution, with Board members noting the benefit of having the Secretariat in place.