

## Civic Pride column – December 2022 by Hester Hand

The National Lottery Community Fund has released a new report titled "From Neighbours to Neighbourhood: Learning on How to Boost Pride in Place". It seemed so relevant to us in Abingdon that I decided to use extracts from it for this month's column. The introduction says:

"From the trees and flowers in the park, to a village hall or a buzzing high street, all communities have features their residents take pride in. These things tie us to where we live, forming our sense of place identity and belonging. However, in recent years, ONS figures confirm that people's sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods has fallen.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a sense that we have an opportunity to change this and the Government has set the goal of raising pride in place in every area of the country by 2030 as part of its levelling up objectives."

The report identifies factors which increase that sense of pride, such as:

- Empowering everyone: beyond just being consulted, people need a real say in local decisions and how funding is allocated. This includes those who don't usually have their voices heard or feel excluded. A diverse outreach team can help a wider range of people feel confident enough to speak up.
- Enhancing the environment: neighbourhoods need 'bumping spaces' where people meet by chance and interact naturally to get to know one another better. If these spaces are attractive and welcoming, they help to deepen social bonds.
- Valuing venues: when community venues are in community control, they naturally become hubs that respond quickly to local needs. The activities they offer can be a social lifeline, and help people to recognise one another as friends and neighbours rather than strangers.
- Providing participation: volunteering opportunities help people become actively engaged, but it's important to provide a variety of roles and entry points. Linking opportunities to local and national celebrations can be a good way to engage new people.
- Healing high streets: as retail declines, there is an opportunity to diversify high streets, offering a mix of community businesses, local services, housing, creative spaces, meeting places, and traditional retail. This can help communities feel ownership of their town centres.
- Harnessing heritage: engaging in local history can help people to build a sense of shared identity through learning more about their past. Heritage buildings offer a way to do this, especially when they are used as community venues that make everyone feel welcome.
- Connecting through culture: cultural events bring people together and give them an outlet to express themselves to one another. This strengthens community bonds especially when events help people to connect across normal dividing lines.

Finally, the main report includes examples of practical actions local councils and community groups can take. My Christmas wish is that our councillors and our community-minded residents read it and pick a few ideas to take forward in Abingdon in the coming year.