

Community

Six Pillars of a Better Future

The foundations of strong community – a secure home, meaningful relationships and a lived environment that is safe – have been weakened by a mixture of global forces and misguided policy. This in turn has contributed to a breakdown of responsibility. Too many people no longer feel responsible for themselves and for one another. There is too little respect and too much division. A concerted policy programme to foster community can begin to change that and offer a path to a more cohesive society.



Communities Under Pressure

Some of the reasons for the erosion of communities are complex and go back many years. For example, the decline of high streets, pubs, post offices and libraries is linked to forces of globalisation and technological change, which have disrupted traditional forms of economic life.

Others are more recent. When it comes to the lack of affordable homes to buy or to rent, government policy has prioritised interventions that will do little to address the underlying problems, notably by focusing on the supply of housing in general.

On security, the issue has been one of neglect. Too often over the past decade, government has taken a back seat, leaving local areas to deal with crime and anti-social behaviour. As a result, gang-related violence and anti-social behaviour have been left to spiral out of control and offenders have been left free to commit crimes unpunished.

The weakening of the social fabric cannot be repaired overnight but nor is it irreversible.

Meanwhile, despite the promises made before Brexit, the government has neglected to set out a serious plan for an asylum system that is buckling under the weight of trying to deal with a surge in demand. The lack of any comprehensive system of identification means failed asylum seekers are too easily able to disappear into the black economy and the absence of an agreement with the EU on safe returns hinders repatriation of those whose claims are rejected.

These failures are eroding people's faith in the rules that govern how we live together, which is not only undermining personal responsibility but also creating a vacuum in which prejudice and extremism can thrive.

A New Agenda for Community

The weakening of the social fabric cannot be repaired overnight but nor is it irreversible. What is required are policies that are clear-eyed about the nature of the problems we face.

A programme to rebuild community should include the following core elements:

- Strong communities rely on people of all **housing** tenures putting down roots. Most urgently this means improving the conditions, rights and security of families in the private rented sector, and reinvesting in the social-housing stock. But it also requires an effective strategy to boost home ownership – especially through reforming the access to finance.
- Achieving safe communities requires a cross-government strategy for tackling **crime and anti-social behaviour**, combining early intervention, for example, to ensure troubled families are given the support they need to keep children out of harm's way, with tough enforcement to disrupt the gangs trafficking drugs and fuelling violence on our streets.
- People are more likely to do the right thing when they believe there are rules that are both fair and properly enforced. Two years on from Brexit, the government must set out a practical plan for **securing our borders** against illegal immigration, including a proper system of [digital ID](#).
- An important part of repairing the social fabric is ensuring we **balance diversity with integration**, with universal acceptance of the rules, laws and norms of our society. Rather than remaining neutral on this question, government must facilitate greater integration, for example, through ensuring proper provision of English-language teaching and removing barriers to mixing within schools.
- **Local government** is a critical vehicle for fostering community, but too often it is primarily seen as an agent of central-government delivery. Reform must hand local government the tools to create vibrant local places, with green space, access to sports, arts and culture, and institutions that build and reinforce shared values. This will require more [fiscal and policy autonomy](#) to be devolved along with accountability to local people.

- The technological revolution offers huge opportunities for rebuilding communities as well as challenges to tackle features of the online world that amplify discord and weaken cohesion. Government has a key role to play in shaping the **digital environment** to strengthen community, from the transformation of public services to addressing the corrosive effects of online abuse and [harm](#).

The approach we outline here offers a credible agenda that, if implemented, would begin to reverse trends that have seen our communities become less safe, vibrant, cohesive and tolerant, and would instead point the way to social renewal.

Further Reading

[Bringing It Home: Raising Home Ownership by Reforming Mortgage Finance](#)

[A New Approach to Digital Identity](#)

[Fixing the Plumbing: Resetting the Framework of Local Government Funding](#)

[Social Media Futures: How to Reconcile Anonymity, Abuse and Identity Online](#)