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business in
community
hands



The Wharton Trust, Hartlepool

Catalyst Profile: The Wharton Trust, Hartlepool

A report prepared for Power to Change
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01. Introduction

Empowering Places aims to build more resilient communities by catalysing and nurturing community businesses to provide benefits and opportunities for local people. The programme funds locally rooted ‘catalyst’ organisations in six places across England to help empower communities to develop community businesses:

- [Abram Ward Community Cooperative \(AWCC\) in Abram, Wigan](#)
- [B-Inspired in Braunstone, Leicester](#)
- [Centre4 in Nunthorpe and Bradley Park, Grimsby](#)
- [Real Ideas in Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth](#)
- [The Wharton Trust in Dyke House, Hartlepool](#)
- [Made in Manningham, incubated by Participate Projects in Manningham, Bradford](#)

The Empowering Places programme is delivered by a consortium of organisations including [Power to Change](#), [Cooperatives UK](#) the lead delivery partner, and with support from expert ‘tech leads’ at the [Centre for Local Economic Strategies \(CLES\)](#) and The [New Economics Foundation \(NEF\)](#). Each catalyst organisation receives up to £1m (between July 2017 and July 2022). The catalysts also have access to a capacity support provider pool, grant funding and money to award seed grants to emerging community businesses in their areas to deliver a five-year plan. This report summarises the interim findings from an independent evaluation of the Empowering Places programme, delivered by a consortium led by Renaisi.

The aim of this evaluation is to enable Power to Change and its stakeholders to learn about how to work in places, and how community businesses can drive local change.

This profile for Hartlepool is part of a series of outputs aiming to take a developmental, learning based approach to understanding and improving the programme, and to support wider learning for similar programmes in the future. There is a separate profile for each of the six places in the programme. This profile includes:

- **The socio-economic context of Hartlepool drawing on publicly available datasets, and using findings from a hyperlocal version of the Community Life Survey commissioned by Power to Change in 2018.**
- **Details of the catalyst organisation The Wharton Trust , its vision and organisational structure, using information provided in programme documents authored by the catalyst organisations, as well as organisational data registered on the Charity Commission website.**
- **Approaches to delivering the Empowering Places programme taken by The Wharton Trust, drawing on qualitative data, including interviews with staff at Power to Change, delivery partners, catalyst staff and community businesses – as well as information provided in programme reporting documents authored by the catalyst, delivery partners and Power to Change. ¹ Researchers have also taken detailed notes and used an observation and learning log to track relevant findings and develop a comprehensive understanding of the development and impact of the programme.**

As a set, the profiles are designed to allow the exploration of similarities and differences in context and approaches across the Empowering Places areas, and to draw out learning gathered throughout the first three and a half years of delivery.

This profile uses data collected from the beginning of the programme (July 2017) to February 2021. A large portion of the qualitative data was collected in 2020 just as the Covid-19 pandemic was taking hold, and views and experiences may have shifted since then. The profiles will be updated again towards the end of the programme (June 2022), with a view to tracking change.

¹ These include: Power to Change's Learning Paper on Empowering Places, Power to Change's internal quarterly reports, Co-operatives UK reports to Power to Change, notes from community business health checks and diagnostic sessions.

02. Executive Summary: The Wharton Trust, Dyke House, Hartlepool

The Wharton Trust is a well-established community organisation that actively supports the growth of resident engagement and community leadership in the area. Based out of community and resource centre – The Annexe, the Trust offer a wide range of activities and services; and are involved in other prominent local place-based initiatives like Big Local, and Place Based Social Action.

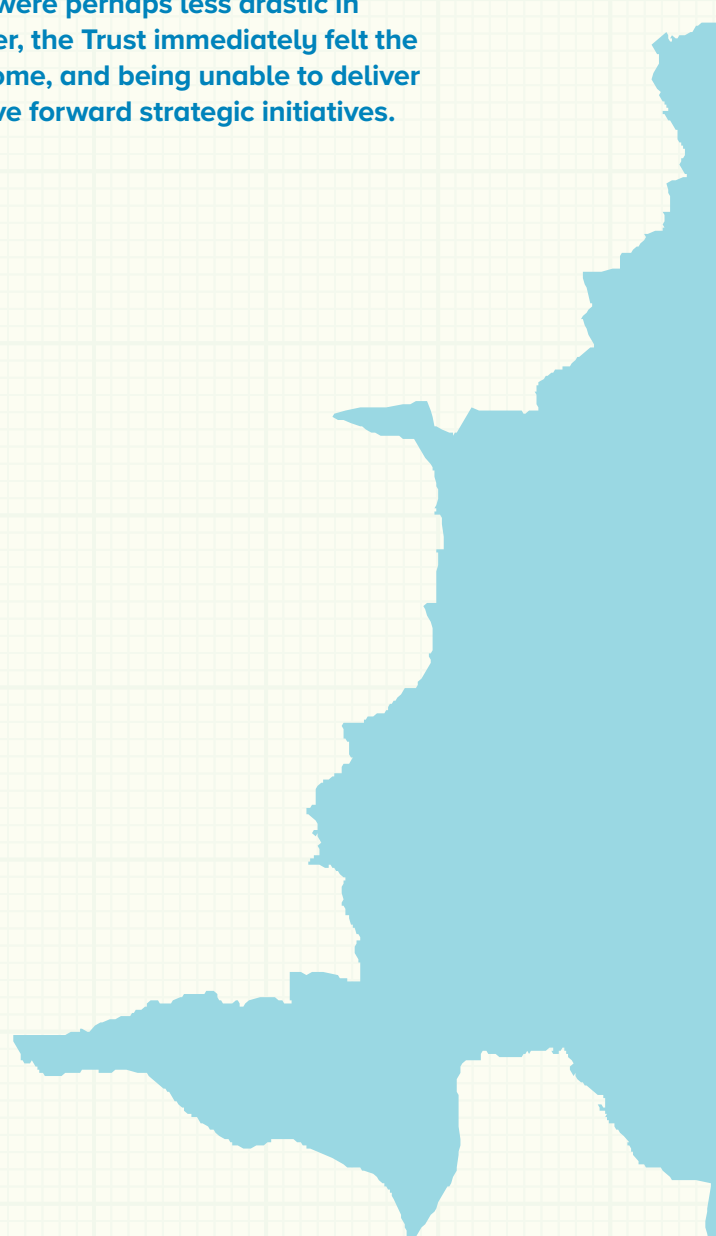
This profile explores the context of the Hartlepool area as well as the Trust's approach to delivering the Empowering Places programme, the emerging impact of the programme on the catalyst, community businesses and wider community and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Trust and the delivery of the programme in Hartlepool.



Key points

- The Wharton Trust is based in the Dyke House area of Hartlepool, a square mile where most of its work takes place. Dyke House sits within the top 2% of deprived wards in the UK, and is in the lowest 5% for employment rates in the country. Services run by the Trust include supporting community members access employment and training, promoting healthier lifestyles, youth activities, access to a community library and free use of computers and wifi.
- Through the Empowering Places programme, the Trust is looking to become more commercially minded and more sustainable, by building its asset base and generating new income sources. The programme so far has specifically enabled the Trust to hone its enterprise development offer.
- At a community level, the Trust looks to inspire and empower the local community to apply their own solutions to local problems; Empowering Places enables them to do this through a community business lens. The Trust is supporting a total of six community businesses by providing seed grants and wrap around business support, as well as providing access to specialist consultancy support through the provider pool.
- The Trust has drawn on Empowering Places to strengthen and develop itself as a community business, ensuring sustainability into the future. In particular, the Trust has drawn on support from its tech lead at the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), to help build and develop connections across the wider area, enabling it to be more outward facing. The Trust has also used support to help build internal capacity for things like business support, entrepreneurial skills and community organising.

- The new outward facing nature of the Trust, supported by Empowering Places, has meant the CEO has increasingly been drawn into wider place conversations and is being asked to take part in more policy and influencing work. The Trust also recently purchased a community shop, and two houses, which will form the foundations of a new housing cooperative, increasing its visibility and sustainability.
- The Trust’s ability to leverage appropriate and relevant local and national expertise from the provider pool, appears to have had the greatest impact on new community businesses in terms of development. Enabling new business leaders to grow skills and confidence, take forward new ideas, scale up their delivery and think about sustainable trading models.
- As a community already experiencing high levels of deprivation and unemployment, changes driven by Covid-19 were perhaps less drastic in Hartlepool than in some other areas. However, the Trust immediately felt the impact of Covid-19 through loss of rental income, and being unable to deliver day-to-day services. It used this pause to drive forward strategic initiatives.



03. Dyke House, Hartlepool

Context of area

Dyke House is a square mile-sized estate in north Hartlepool, a short distance from Hartlepool town centre and the marina. It has a primary school, college and several small shops.

The catalyst selection criteria for Empowering Places was to be operating in a deprived place, with opportunities for community business growth. Hartlepool has an Index of Multiple Deprivation average source rank of 18² and has at least one neighbourhood in the 10% most deprived areas in the country.

Empowering Places catalyst area: Dyke House, Hartlepool ³	
Population	14,895
Household income, after housing costs (England average: £27,311)	£21,222
White British (%) England average 79.8%	97%
Under 25 (%) England average 31%	33.6%
65+ (%) England average 18.2%	16.2%
Thriving Places Index⁴	Hartlepool
Health Equality (Thriving Places Index, this indicator looks at slope index in life expectancy at birth)	4.14
Mental and Physical Health (Thriving Places Index, this include indicators such as child obesity rate, conceptions in under 18s, illness & disability, prevalence of depression, anxiety and other health indicators)	2.84
Education and Learning (Thriving Places Index, this includes indicators such as adults with no qualifications, life-long learning, educational attainment of children, childcare quality and school readiness)	4.12

² Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015

³ Local Insights (2019)

⁴ Thriving Places Index (2020)

Work and Local Economy (Thriving Places Index, this includes indicators such as income deprivation affecting different sections of the population, employment and percentage with low income)	2.47
Place and Environment (Thriving Places Index, this indicator covers the local environment, housing, transport and safety. This includes green land cover, air pollution, journey times to key services, housing affordability ratio and crime severity index)	5.27
Subjective Happiness (ONS Life Satisfaction Scores)	7.39

Thriving Places Explanation: Scores of between 0 and 10. Scores are coloured to reflect similarity to the England Average, with higher scores indicating that a place is doing better than other places in that domain.	
Key	
Very Low Scores (Below 3.5)	
Below Average Scores (3.5 – 4.5)	
Medium Scores (4.5 – 5.5)	
Above Average Scores (5.5 – 6.5)	
Very High Scores (above 6.5)	

Place Analytics: Local Authority area compared with England average ⁵	Hartlepool
Housing Affordability	80% – 100%
Community Assets	Lowest 5%
Employment rate: Ages 16-64	Lowest 5%
Business formation	60% – 80%
Happiness and wellbeing	Lowest 5%

Place Analytics Explanation: Each category is benchmarked using multiple measures simultaneously and scored (in percentile form) relative to other catalyst areas. The higher the percentile, the better the place performed.

Percentile Key:	
80 – 100%	Very High
60 – 80%	High
40 – 60%	Above Average
20 – 40%	Average
5 – 20%	Low

⁵ Place Analytics, local authority wide (2019).

UK Social Fabric Index ⁶						
Local Authority	Social Fabric Score	Relationship Score	Physical Infrastructure	Civic Institutions	Economic Value	Positive Social Norms
Hartlepool	0.37	0.24	0.48	0.38	0.44	0.33
Plymouth	0.45	0.30	0.53	0.46	0.49	0.47
North East Lincolnshire	0.38	0.27	0.50	0.38	0.40	0.36
Leicester	0.42	0.21	0.59	0.49	0.36	0.45
Bradford	0.43	0.28	0.58	0.43	0.43	0.43
Wigan	0.46	0.33	0.57	0.45	0.53	0.45

UK Social Fabric Index Explanation:

Scores are graded from zero to one, with a score of one indicating the best-case scenario.

1. Social Fabric Score: This is a score for the strength of social fabric across all five threads; relationship, physical infrastructure, civic institutions, economic value and positive social norms
2. Relationship Score: This looks at clusters of social groups of people in communities and community-owned assets
3. Physical Infrastructure: This looks at physical assets that are present in communities which facilitate, structure and organise people within a community.
4. Civic Institutions: This looks at the health of democracy and governance at both local and national level, considering quality, trust and satisfaction.
5. Economic Value: This looks at the tangible assets which hold a monetary and/or economic value to an individual or family within a community
6. Positive Social Norms: This looks at the personal well-being and cultural attitudes of individuals and families in a community, including people's wider habits, behaviours and activities

Colour coding: The colour coding has been applied to each score category and is comparative between the six places. The highest score for each category is colour dark green and the lowest dark red. For example, compared to all other places, Bradford scored lowest on economic value and positive social norms.

⁶ [UK Social Fabric Index](#) By Onward (2020).

Local context

Community

Hartlepool is rated highly for access to services, in the top 80-100% in the North East, and top 60-80% when compared nationally in all categories.⁷

A survey carried out in Dyke House in 2019 found residents report a slightly higher-than-average incidence of providing regular (once a month) informal support to others in their community: 30% compared with 26% nationally.⁸

Challenges

15% of people in Dyke House rated their health as being bad or very bad, compared with 8% in their comparator area.⁹

34% of those surveyed in Dyke House rated their level of anxiety as high, versus 27% in the comparator area. 20% of those surveyed rated their quality of life as being low.¹⁰

The Thriving Places Index rates health across Hartlepool as being poor, with risky behaviours – such as smoking and drinking – a particular health concern.¹¹

Economy

Customer spending data from the area between April and August 2020, suggests that local customers spend a higher proportion of their money on items associated with 'disposable income' (42%) than is reflected by local business sales (28%). This means most businesses in the area provide products and services associated with the 'cost of living' (e.g. travel, groceries), whereas a significant proportion of individual expenditure is on items associated with 'disposable income' (e.g. takeaways, entertainment).

The data suggest that general sales growth is down by 4.7% between April and August 2020, but there has also been an average growth in customers of 8.7%. This means that more people are spending, but they are buying less.¹²

⁷ Place Analytics, local authority wide (2019)

⁸ Neighbourhood [Community Life Survey](#) (2019)

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ [Thriving Places Index](#) (2020)

¹² Power to Change data from [Reward](#)

Voluntary and Community Sector

Turnover data are available for 189 voluntary and community sector organisations in Hartlepool for the 2018 financial year. The combined turnover of these organisations was £44 million. This includes some schools, religious organisations, grant-making foundations and international aid. With the economy of Hartlepool worth £1.45 billion in 2018, this means that the voluntary and community sector accounted for approximately 3% of the local economy.¹³

Small- to medium-sized organisations with a turnover between £5,000 and £5 million are most relevant to the programme, as these are the organisations that Empowering Places catalyst organisations are most likely to partner with or influence in their local area. Of the total number of organisations for which turnover data is available in 2018, 135 organisations were in this category and had a combined turnover of £43.8 million, accounting for 99.5% of the total £44 million turnover.¹⁴

Funding Landscape

Funding	Hartlepool ¹⁵
Top five significant funders and amounts between 2017-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (£14 million) – Department for Education (£10 million) – National Lottery Community Fund (£2.4 million) – Home Office (£1.8 million) – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (£945k)
Total number of funders in Hartlepool who have provided data to 360Giving (2017-2020)	31
Total value of grants awarded in Hartlepool by Power to Change (end of 2020)	£965,000

¹³ MyCake analysis of Companies House and Charity Commission Data, Office of National Statistics (April 2020)

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ 360Giving [GrantNav](#) (Dec 2020)

04. The Empowering Places catalyst: The Wharton Trust

The Wharton Trust is a well-established community organisation that actively supports the growth of resident engagement and community leadership in the area. Based in The Annexe, a community and resources centre, it provides support for people to access employment through training and advice, runs activities for young people and promotes healthier lifestyles for all.

Hartlepool is home to a number of prominent place-based initiatives such as resident-led programme Big Local, also managed by Wharton Trust, and Hartlepool Action Lab funded by Joseph Rowntree Foundation and part of the DCMS and National Lottery Community Fund Place-Based Social Action programme. Active links are being made between the programmes, with enterprise and employment being identified as a priority for the local area.

Vision for the Empowering Places programme

The Wharton Trust aims to use the programme to become more commercially minded, capable of generating and operating new income sources to aid its own sustainability. Its ambition is for the community to be even more inspired and empowered to apply their own solutions to local problems, or gaps in provision, using the community business model.

Wharton Trust hopes that local organisations and anchor institutions will actively give 'community business solutions a try' either by direct procurement of services or by encouraging their own community business approach in other neighbourhoods across Tees Valley.

Wider activities of The Wharton Trust

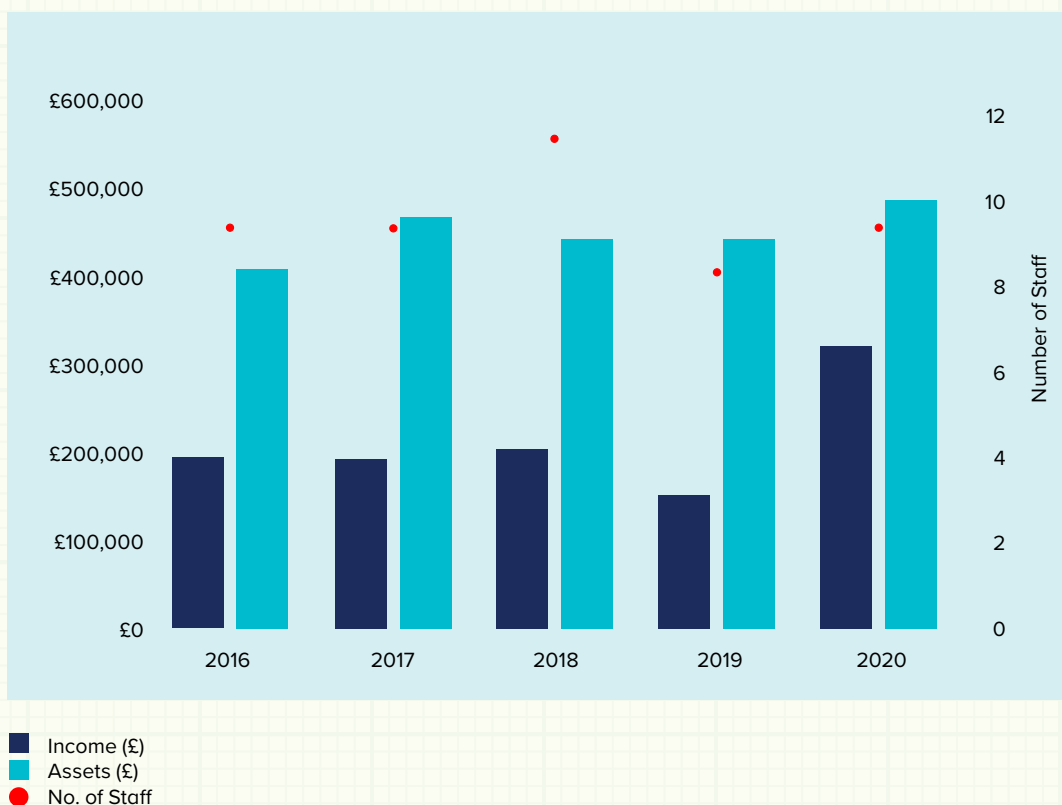
The Wharton Trust offers a wide range of services from their building The Annexe, including supporting people to access employment and training, exercise classes, nutrition advice, youth programmes, a community library and low-cost access to internet services.

As of the 2020 financial year-end, The Wharton Trust employed 9 staff members, and had a total income of £316,000 and assets worth £481,000.¹⁶ The figure below shows The Wharton Trust's self reported total income, value of assets and staff head count between 2016 and 2020.¹⁷

¹⁶ MyCake analysis of Companies House and Charity Commission Data, Office of National Statistics (April 2020)

¹⁷ Power to Change Annual Grantee Survey (2020). The data presented here is self-reported by the Catalyst organisation to Power to Change, with missing data points indicating that no data was submitted.

The Wharton Trust: Total Income, Value of Assets and Staff Head Count between 2016-2020



Empowering Places delivery

The position of Empowering Places within the wider catalyst organisation

The Wharton Trust doesn't tend to separate out its workstreams, with every element contributing to its wider goal of empowering the local community. The combination of programmes and place-based support complement each other to do this effectively. The Empowering Places funding has specifically enabled the Trust to hone its enterprise development offer.

Aims of Empowering Places locally

By 2022, The Wharton Trust is aiming to have supported eight commercially robust community businesses, having worked through a community organising approach to surface ideas. The focus is now on strengthening its nascent community businesses by developing their entrepreneurial skills as well as the Trust's own. The Wharton Trust is also aiming to have created a mutually supportive network of community businesses that can add value to each other, create further trading opportunities and generate joint impact for the local community. The Trust also aims to be delivering tangible community business projects with more partners across a much wider geographic area.

Relationships and levels of influence

The Wharton Trust has a network of both national and local organisations. In a relationship mapping exercise carried out by Shared Assets, The Wharton Trust self-identified that it holds 34 relationships with commercial organisations, community businesses, collaborators, and funders.¹⁸

Type of Relationship	Number of Relationships	Mode Strength of Influence (1-3)	Mode Strength of Relationship (1-3)
Collaborator	13	3	3
Commercial	2	1.5	2.5
Community Business	3	3	3
Funder	6	1	3
Political	8	1	2
Total	32		

A review of charity commission data highlights there are 135 small- to medium-sized voluntary sector organisations in Hartlepool. Based on the number of self-reported collaborator and community business relationships held by The Wharton Trust, it can be estimated that it has relationships with 16 organisations in the voluntary sector. This suggests that it has a relationship with approximately 11.9% of the local sector.

¹⁸ Shared Asset Relationship Mapping of Empowering Places (Sept 2020). RAG rating: Based on a scale of 1-3. Red (1-1.9), Yellow (2.0-2.9) and Green (3)

Approach to delivering Empowering Places

The Wharton Trust has intentionally moved from being a traditional organisation that delivered services and activities to and for people, to an organisation that creates opportunities and support for local people to do it themselves. Its approach to delivering Empowering Places is no different, looking at ways to strategically enable the establishment and growth of up to eight sustainable community businesses.

Part of the Empowering Places remit is also to strengthen and develop The Wharton Trust as a community business itself, ensuring a legacy for the programme and sustainability into the future. The Trust is focusing on building its own capacity through developing a business support service at The Annexe, and the team are developing their own entrepreneurial skills to better support others.

Staff members at The Trust have been trained by Community Organisers UK, and use a community organising approach to help build the capacity of local people and inspire them to make change for themselves. Community Organising is key to the Trust's approach, by enabling the team to consult the community on what they want and need. The community organising approach asks people about their perceptions of the local area, focusing on what they love and what they would change. The issues identified could be indicative of potential community business solutions and those ideas present a potential opportunity for enterprise development.

People with ideas are supported directly by The Trust with business growth advice, access to finance and personal mentoring, or supported to access experts through the Empowering Places provider pool. They also support community businesses with applications and other strategic development, such as partnership proposals.

The Wharton Trust has an increasing focus on growing its asset base which will help it become more sustainable and give the community more ownership locally.

Impact of Empowering Places on The Wharton Trust so far

The Wharton Trust is an integral and embedded part of the Dyke House community. Prior to Empowering Places, all activity took place within the square mile that forms Dyke House. Whilst this is largely still the case, Empowering Places has enabled the Wharton Trust to be more outward facing, and has provided the support and encouragement needed for it to engage with statutory services and businesses covering a wider area, including organisations whose activities inevitably impact on the lives of those living in the Dyke House community. As a result of this work, the Wharton Trust has increasingly been drawn into wider place conversations and been asked to take part in more policy and influencing work. For example, the Trust team appeared on local radio to discuss issues around digital exclusion, and were interviewed by the Guardian, alongside nascent community business Stags, which supports men's mental health.

Dyke House are now part of wider Hartlepool consortium. We would not have been involved with that partnership without Empowering Places – Wharton Trust Staff/Tech Lead

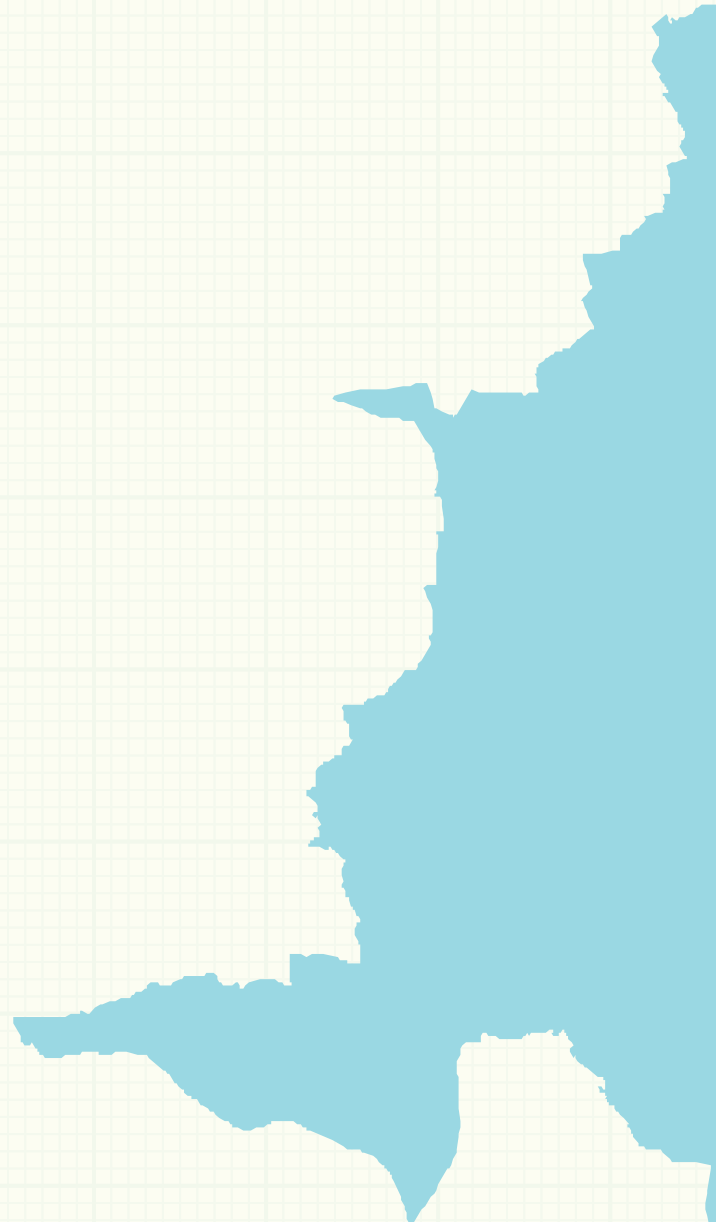
This wider engagement and newer focus on enterprise development through Empowering Places has helped leverage Local Access Funding into Hartlepool. The Wharton Trust has also been able to apply for opportunities like the 'Creative People and Places Partnership' with support from the programme, on behalf of community business BloominArt.

Inspiration from other catalyst organisations on the programme, coupled with a drive to be more sustainable, have led the Wharton Trust to use Empowering Places capacity support and funding to develop its asset base. After 30 years of 'squatting' in its building, the Trust has been able to purchase the freehold of The Annex Community Centre. It has also recently purchased a community shop, and the first two houses of the Annexe Housing cooperative; The Trust aims to be a better, more accountable landlord with more affordable rents, and reinvesting rent money locally. The Trust also started a commissioning process for a potential asset transfer of a local sports ground which was unfortunately unsuccessful, but remains a priority.

The Trust's community organising approach, supported by Empowering Places, has generated two big ideas: a community-based wifi scheme which has provoked a wider local conversation around solutions to tackle digital inequality; and Annexe Housing, a new cooperative housing scheme, to continue a culture of empowerment and train tenants as community organisers.

It is anticipated that both the new community businesses (the shop and Annexe Housing) will have a huge impact in terms of the visibility of the Trust and the benefits of community ownership, as well as being instrumental to the legacy of Empowering Places.

Since we have the shop, people are coming and showing interest, it shows what having an asset can do – Wharton Trust Staff/Tech Lead



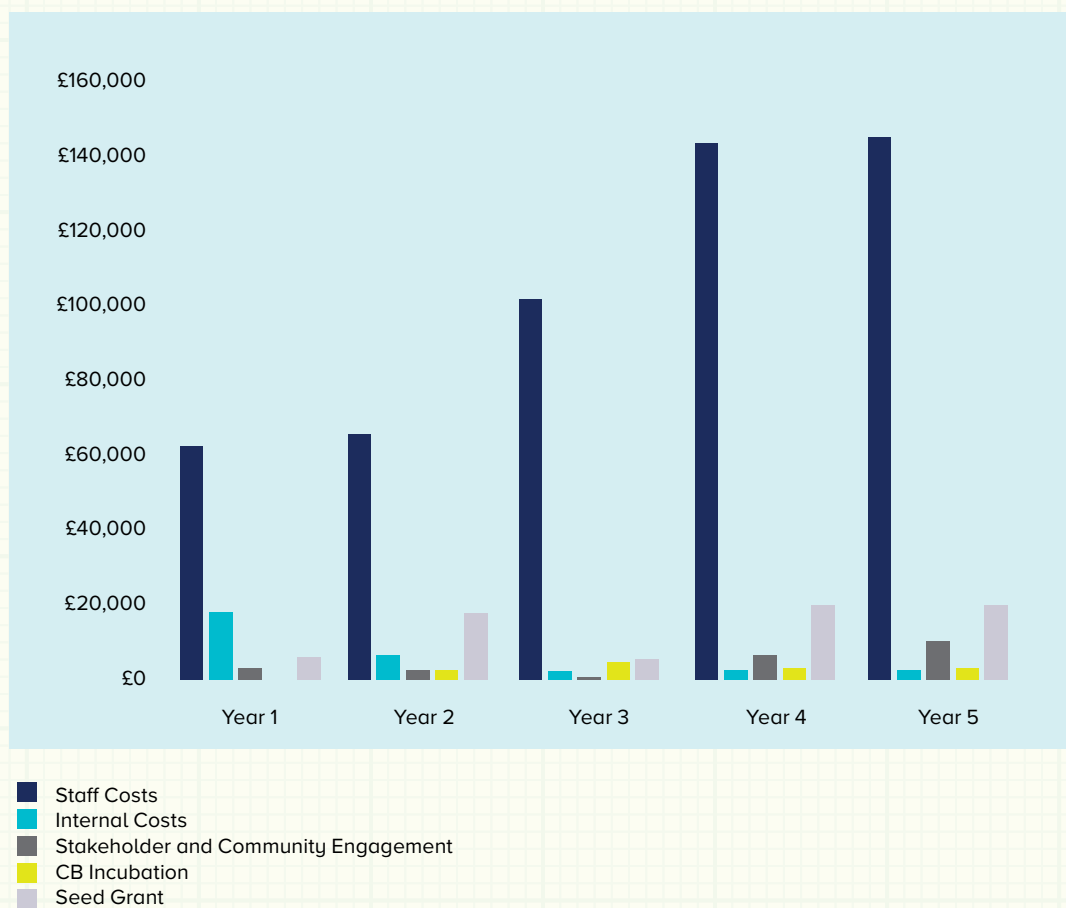
Support and funding drawn down from the Empowering Places programme

Support for catalyst organisation	The Wharton Trust ¹⁹
Power to Change, Empowering Places Funding	£664,900
Tailored support	1. Impact measuring tools and procurement with anchor institutions Requested: 15 days valued at £7,500 Used: 15 days 2. Local economic plan support Requested: 25 days valued at £12,500 Used: 15 days so far 3. Phased support for a feasibility of an asset transfer of football pitches and pavilion. Support with asset transfer and to plan how this asset could support community business activity Requested: 21 days valued at £10,500 Used: 21 days 4. Community Organising Requested: 10 days valued at £5,000 Used: None so far 5. Coaching Requested: 1.3 days valued at £666 Used: All 1.3 days
Total tailored support used	Requested: 72.3 days at £36,166 Used: 52.3 days, invoicing £26,150
Other capacity support	– Website support – Equipment – Communications support – Building work – Support to Community Businesses – Community Engagement
Total other capacity support	Requested: £30,335 Invoiced: £23,635
Support for Community Businesses	
Seed grants	Dispersed 6 seed grants worth a total of £21,500
Tailored support	No tailored support requested

¹⁹ Power to Change Airtable Charting (As of March 2021)

The figure below provides a breakdown of the financial support claimed by The Wharton Trust between years one and two of the Empowering Places programme, as well as the requested amount for the remaining three years of the programme.²⁰ Staff Costs includes the cost of freelance support, and internal costs includes office rental, equipment, travel, subsistence, marketing, communications and events costs.

Breakdown of Financial Support Claimed (in Years 1-2) and Requested (Years 3-5)



²⁰ Power to Change Grant Overview Snapshot (As of March 2021)

Impact of capacity support provided by the Empowering Places programme

The Wharton Trust has a clear vision and ways of working as well as an excellent network of local connections. Engagement with the Empowering Places capacity support was not immediate, and it took the team some time to understand what could be most useful and who to access the support from. The Trust has found the most successful approach to be using a mixture of support from national and local providers. National organisations such as the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) have helped with strategic place work including working with key local partners, asset acquisition, and community wealth building. Local organisations and a local consultant, more recently added to the provider pool, have supported community businesses with developing their business plans and accessing funding.

The CEO at Wharton Trust has developed a strong working relationship with the Tech Lead from CLES, who has been able to act as a critical friend, helping the Trust team to think more strategically about how they invest in capacity and skills, looking to the longer-term challenges such as Empowering Places funding coming to an end, and connecting them up with wider opportunities, such as business support available through the council. Together, they have also focused on building outward connections and, using the influence of CLES to act as a neutral outsider, they have been able to open doors for the Wharton Trust, facilitating new connections with the council and their assets team.

When CLES are involved we are not just The Annexe – Wharton Trust Staff /Tech Lead

Help from the Tech Lead has also included supporting The Wharton Trust with a bid for Sport England, and supporting community businesses BloominArt with a bid for Creative People and Places funding. CLES has also supported BloominArt to develop its governance and business plan and helped it to think about how to build a sustainable income.

The Wharton Trust has supported all the emerging community businesses with initial seed grants to develop their businesses. They have also benefitted from capacity support from the provider pool, for example two local business advisors were used to support new community business Stags to develop a business plan which builds a model of sustainable trading in three years.

The community businesses supported by The Wharton Trust

No	Community Business	Type	Support from programme ²¹
1	Run Fit Hartlepool CIC	Contracting with charities and public health to deliver organised sessions to specific populations as well as to the wider public	Seed Grant: Received a seed grant for £3,000. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
2	BloominArt	Deliver creative workshops with young people to build confidence and put on events.	Seed Grant: Received a seed grant for £5,000. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
3	Make Dyke House Beautiful	In inception	Seed Grant: Received a seed grant for £500. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
4	Annexe Housing	Purchasing and renovating housing stock locally	Seed Grant: Have not requested a seed grant from The Wharton Trust. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
5	Bringing Communities Together CIC	Providing educational and creative services. Taken over by local Hospice to diversify to go beyond patients and reach into the wider community	Seed Grant: Received a seed grant for £5,000. Capacity Support: Have not requested capacity support.
6	Stags, formerly Mind for Men	In inception – mental health support organisation for men	Seed Grant: Received a seed grant for £5,000 Capacity Support: 2 x consultants for business support and development, and funding

²¹Power to Change Airtable Charting (As of Dec 2020)

Emerging impact on community businesses and the wider community

Stags is one of Wharton Trust's emerging community businesses, initially set up in response to a need for immediate mental health support, because other local providers had waiting lists of up to 12 weeks. The Wharton Trust has given Stags a space at The Annexe for three years, which the group has transformed into somewhere comfortable and useable for group meetings, referring to it as their 'safe haven'. The Wharton Trust have also been able to support the group with a seed grant, and business support through Empowering Places, which has supported the group to scale up their delivery and think about sustainability planning. Stags supported 60 people in October 2020 alone. When interviewed, the founder of the organisation spoke of working alongside 17 individuals who were in very dire situations, one of whom was ready to take his own life. The impact of the support Stags provides has been both immediate and will be long-term, with the group acknowledging it can take months for people to come out of their shell.

Covid has struck everybody with mental health, really bad situations happened really quickly because of Covid. Providing social interaction and getting people out of the house is how we have been able to support them – Community Business Staff

Many of the group's clients now help to run Stags in a voluntary capacity, allowing them to feel responsible and accountable for others, as well as themselves. As a result of investment from Empowering Places, Stags has recently set up as a referral point for a local mental health hospital. It has a business plan in place which will allow it to use the group's existing skills as well as developing members' skills so that they can improve spaces, develop gardens, do work and be paid for it.

Community business BloominArt is a creative organisation that delivers projects across Hartlepool. Much of its work is cross-sector, using creativity as a hook to engage people. It works with local schools and colleges and runs an annual arts festival for the town. The impact of Empowering Places on BloominArt has been in supporting the two founders to be more strategic, move to the next level of delivery and build a pathway to sustainability. With support from the Tech Lead, BloominArt applied for Creative People and Places funding, available to areas where involvement in the arts is significantly below the national average. If successful, this funding will allow the team to create a network of creative organisations across Hartlepool, and train 10 artists in community organising. This will put them at the centre of a collective approach and creative network in Hartlepool, positively challenging the two founders to take on the role of strategic leaders. When interviewed both women talked about the journey they have been supported on to build their own confidence and in turn feel better able to support the community.

Building our own confidence to be able to run a community business well has been vital, we have always seen the community as seeking permission to do anything and want to empower them, but we realised we were the same –
Community Business staff



05. Impact of Covid-19 on the local area

According to the Social Economy Data Lab (SEDL), Hartlepool falls into the most vulnerable quintile for Covid, scoring 5 out of 5 on the vulnerability scoring.²² It also ranks the highest of the six places in four of the ten health risks and vulnerability factors relating to Covid-19. The table below scores various relevant risk factors out of 10 in comparison to the five other Empowering Places.

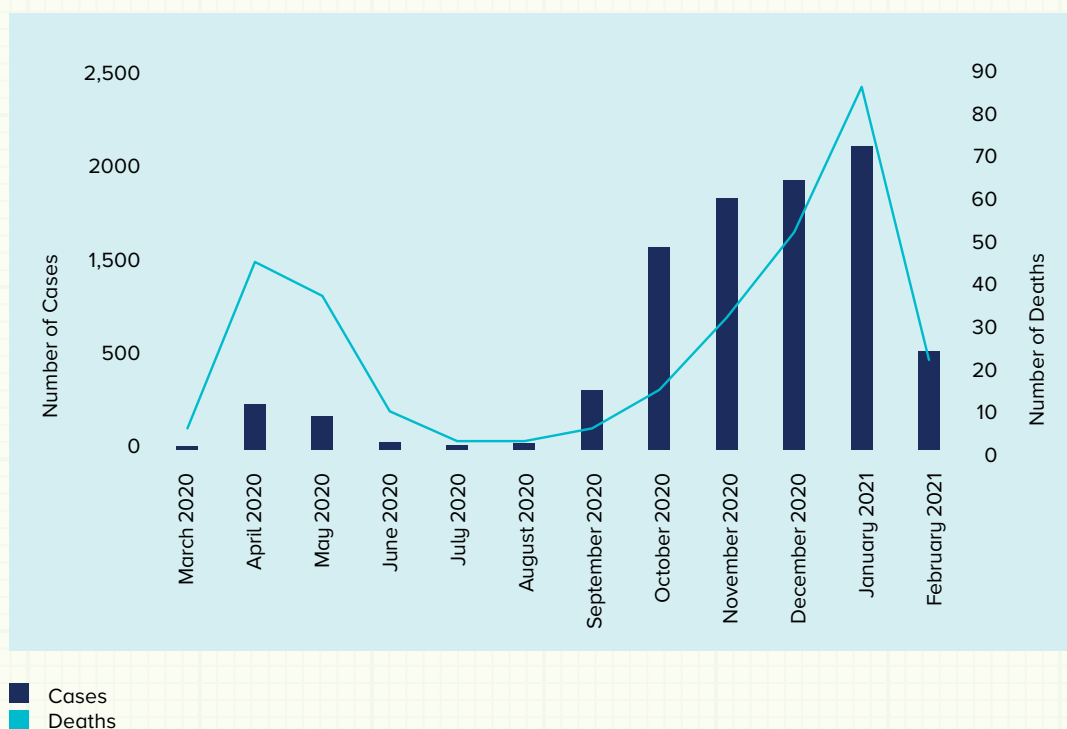
Indicator ²³	Hartlepool	Plymouth	Grimsby	Bradford	Leicester	Wigan
Total 70+ population	9.15	9.34	10	7.32	5.85	9.26
Obese adults	9.37	8.39	10	8.75	7.99	8.77
People aged 15 who are regular smokers	10	7.95	10	9.62	4.97	6.44
Receiving benefits for health or disability	10	6.57	7.48	6.54	6.47	6.60
Self-reported at-risk groups	10	8.76	8.35	8.56	9.05	9.45
Underlying health issues	10	8.02	8.63	9.44	8.00	8.66
Key workers	9.61	9.16	10	9.22	9.15	7.55
Vulnerable jobs	9.15	9.44	10	9.00	9.19	9.10
Vulnerable businesses	8.96	8.78	10	8.72	8.22	8.03
Groups requiring additional support	7.98	7.08	7.34	8.06	10.00	6.48

²² Covid-19 and Communities: [Mapping](#) the Covid-19 Effect by Social Economy Data Lab (2020)

²³ Local Insights (2020). Each risk factors is scored out of 10 in comparison to the other Empowering Places locations, with a score of 10 indicating the highest risk.

The figure below shows the number of new Covid-19 cases and deaths as per date of test and date of death in Hartlepool. In total, at the time of writing (March 2020), Hartlepool had more than 8,600 cases and 310 deaths.²⁴

Monthly Covid-19 Cases and Deaths in Hartlepool



²⁴ Coronavirus Data [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) (As of 18th March 2021)

What Covid-19 means for Hartlepool

Covid-19 related restrictions have had minimal impact on Hartlepool in regard to local trade. As shown below, data from the Social Economy Data Lab indicates that both grocery sales and total sales have increased in the five months between April 2020 and August 2020.²⁵

Month	Grocery Sales Change (month to previous year)	Total Sales Change (month to previous year)
Apr-20	60 – 80% Increase	100% + Increase
May-20	100% + Increase	100% + Increase
Jun-20	80 – 100% Increase	100% + Increase
Jul-20	20 – 40% Increase	80 – 100% Increase
Aug-20	20 – 40% Increase	40 – 60% Increase

There are six Covid-19 Mutual Aid groups in Hartlepool. These groups serve a total population of 93,242 people, therefore they each service a population of approximately 15,540 people. This equates to more mutual aid groups per head than the national average, which would be approximately four for a town of this size and roughly 23,900 people served per Covid-19 mutual aid group.²⁶

²⁵ Covid-19 and Communities: [Mapping](#) the Covid-19 Effect by Social Economy Data Lab (2020)

²⁶ [Covid Mutual Aid Calculation](#) (2020)

Impact of Covid-19 on The Wharton Trust and its approach to Empowering Places

In response to the crisis the community in Hartlepool instantly came together in a joined-up response, which is reflected in the relatively high number of mutual aid groups set up, per head, compared to the national average. As a community already experiencing high levels of deprivation and unemployment, changes driven by Covid-19 were perhaps less drastic in Hartlepool than in some other areas.

The Wharton Trust felt the immediate impact of Covid-19 through a loss of income from room hire. It also had to furlough three members of staff. The Trust received business rates relief and a small grant from the National Emergency Trust to help them with this financial loss.

Social distancing prevented the Trust from being able to offer normal services to local people, and stopped people being able to use the building. During the first Covid-19 lockdown, the Trust mobilised its volunteers, collected food that would otherwise have gone to landfill and found 350 Easter eggs to give to children. Goods were left outside the building and wifi was left on without a password, so that people felt welcome to use the space. As restrictions were lifted it began letting a limited number of people into the building, using safety measures like a traffic light system.

The Wharton Trust used this pause in day-to-day delivery as an opportunity to drive forward strategic initiatives as part of the Empowering Places programme, such as furthering its assets work and putting in an application to deliver affordable community broadband.

Impact of Covid-19 on community businesses

Supported by the Wharton Trust, most of the community businesses in Dyke House continued to operate with adaptations during the crisis.

BloominArt was commissioned by the Wharton Trust to remotely curate a piece of collaborative artwork. The project, 'silver linings', asked local people to send in weekly contributions such as poems, drawings and collages. To support people to take part, BloominArt initially sent out 100 creative packs, and these were so well received that the team ordered a further 1,000, expanding the organisation's reach from those it was already working with to care homes, a women's refuge centre, the foodbank, and a group working with young people living in care. Unable to hold its annual winter arts festival, BloominArt is planning a creative arts trail instead. This will include using local artists to deliver art boxes to local people and working with local community ambassadors to motivate their street to take part.

Community business Stags had been using The Annexe as a meeting place and therefore had to find new ways to meet. An unexpected positive to this has been the benefits the group have gained from meeting outside, as well as the responsibility some members have taken on to arrange these meetings, even progressing from weekly walks to daily walks during the summer months.

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