POLICY & DATA INNOVATION

Unlocking Town Profiles: Reshaping Local Futures

HOW "LEFT BEHIND" PLACES & THE NEW UEP FRAMEWORK RESHAPE LOCAL FUTURES

Prepared for Planners, Community Leaders, and Local Authorities | Launching September 2026

In recent years, the phrase "left behind" has moved from a vague political slogan to a precise, measurable reality across the UK. Scholars and parliamentary bodies define a left behind town as one facing a severe "double disadvantage": high socio-economic deprivation (poverty, unemployment, poor health) combined with a lack of social infrastructure—the physical meeting spaces, transport links, and digital connectivity needed to keep a community thriving.

While traditional economic data often misses the nuanced stories of these places, tools like Understanding Scottish Places (USP), Understanding English Places (UEP - launching in September 2026) and digital portals (such as Historic England's Understanding Historic Places initiative) are transforming how we analyse, profile, understand and support local communities.

> *"As in Scotland, it remains an issue that local and national government do not present or mandate the presentation of their (and other) data on a town basis (operating far too often on a meaningless, whole administrative local authority basis). So much more could be done by building our understanding collectively and consistently via government support, direction and funding."*
>
> **— PROFESSOR LEIGH SPARKS, CHAIR OF SCOTLAND'S TOWNS PARTNERSHIP**

1. What Makes a Town "Left Behind"?

To fix a problem, you first have to define it. Under criteria developed by Local Trust and the APPG for 'Left Behind' Neighbourhoods, a community is left behind when deprivation overlaps with a deficit in civic assets. Unlike deprived urban centres that still boast transport hubs, colleges, or community halls, left behind towns face isolation on multiple fronts:

- **Missing Civic Infrastructure:** Shuttered youth clubs, a lack of green spaces, and no accessible community hubs.
- **Connectivity Bottlenecks:** Infrequent local bus routes and poor broadband coverage limiting employment access.
- **Low Social Capital:** Fewer local charities, lower levels of community investment, and diminished decision-making power.

Regions disproportionately affected include post-industrial pit villages in East Durham, former manufacturing centres in Teesside and the Humber, and isolated seaside towns like Skegness or Jaywick Sands.

2. Unpacking the Profile of a Town

For decades, national policy in England treated towns with a broad brush—assuming what worked for a major city would work for an outer estate or a coastal town. The UEP approach seeks to address this fundamental issue, recognising that every town has a unique historical, economic, and social fingerprint. By understanding population size, demographic characteristics, and service dependencies, you can cluster towns into similar places across England.

By bringing together over 80 datasets based on the area of a town, UEP builds a comprehensive town profile answering key questions:

- **Origin & Evolution:** Did the town develop around a single mill, a coal seam, a railway junction, or a market?
- **Socio-Economic Health:** What is the local wage structure, skill distribution, and reliance on key industries?
- **Spatial & Heritage Identity:** How do existing buildings, high streets, and public spaces contribute to local identity?

3. How the Understanding English Places Portal Will Help

Launching in September 2026, UEP acts as a central digital gateway of facts, providing accessible, location-specific data:

Portal Feature	Benefit for Left Behind Towns
Evidence Based Policy	Provides immediate access to robust data on socio-demographic profiles, asset provision, and connectivity.
Peer to Peer Benchmarking	Identifies "peer" places nationwide through clustering to share best practices and benchmark performance.
Evidence for Funding Bids	Equips community groups with clear, granular data to justify long-term investments from funds like Community Wealth Fund.
Hyper-Local Context	Breaks down data to the town level, highlighting pockets of deep deprivation hidden within prosperous districts.
Effective Resource Deployment	Provides a baseline of need to ensure central and local capital is deployed for maximum economic impact.

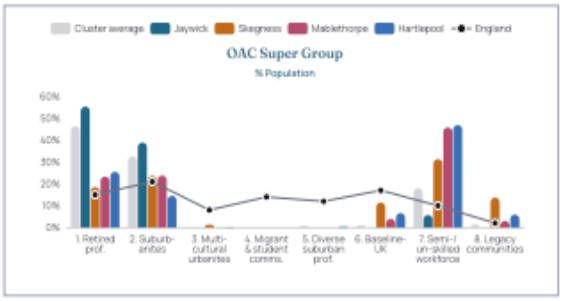
Case Study: Output Examples for 'Left Behind' Towns

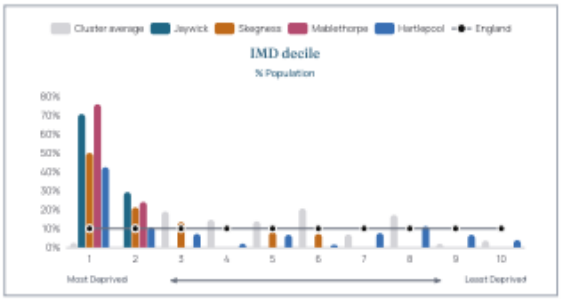
Example outputs comparing **Jaywick** (Primary Town) with benchmark towns **Skegness**, **Mablethorpe**, and **Hartlepool**.

- **Jaywick in Context:** 9 similar places across the model clustering framework.
- **Comparison Summary:** High Deprivation. Low employment. Low Skills. Predominantly White. Lack of facilities incl green space. High Crime rates. Low house prices. Semi -/unskilled workforce.Higher number of No Qualifications. Poor General Health.

Jaywick	Skegness	Mablethorpe	Hartlepool
Cluster 6 3-10,000 population Dependent to Interdependent	Cluster 6 10-40,000 population Independent	Cluster 6 3-10,000 population Interdependent to Independent	Cluster 5 40-200,000 population Independent
Population (2024) 5.3K	Population (2024) 21.5k	Population (2024) 7.6k	Population (2024) 94k
Pop. Change (2021-24) 4.7%	Pop. Change (2021-24) 1.9%	Pop. Change (2021-24) -0.8%	Pop. Change (2021-24) 5.4%
Avg. House Price (2025) £161K	Avg. House Price (2025) £179k	Avg. House Price (2025) £168k	Avg. House Price (2025) £141k
Avg. IMD Decile 1.3	Avg. IMD Decile 2.2	Avg. IMD Decile 1.2	Avg. IMD Decile 3.8
Same address 1 year ago 92%	Same address 1 year ago 90%	Same address 1 year ago 91%	Same address 1 year ago 91%
In employment 28.5%	In employment 43%	In employment 29.9%	In employment 49.2%
JTW - net outflow 505	JTW - net outflow -374	JTW - net outflow -22	JTW - net outflow 3,506

- **Geodemographics and Index of Multiple Deprivation**





What are OAC super groups?

Index Multiple Deprivation (avg. decile)	Zero Deprivation dimensions (%hh)	3+ Deprivation dimensions (%hh)
1.3	**21.2%**	**11.8%**
More deprived than similar places	Less than similar places	More than similar places
Sk 2.2	Sk 31.3%	Sk 8.3%
Ma 1.2	Ma 25.8%	Ma 8.8%
Ha 3.8	Ha 41.7%	Ha 5.9%

- **Ethnicity**

Jaywick		Cluster average		England	
White	97.0%	White	97.8%	White	81.0%
Asian	0.7%	Asian	0.9%	Asian	9.6%
Black	0.3%	Black	0.3%	Black	4.2%
Mixed	1.7%	Mixed	0.9%	Mixed	3.0%
Other	0.3%	Other	0.3%	Other	2.2%

White %	Address 1 year ago outside UK (% pop)
97.0%	**0.2%**
Same as similar places	Less than similar places
Sk 97.0%	Sk 0.3%
Ma 98.0%	Ma 0.3%
Ha 97.0%	Ha 0.3%

- **Green Space and Playing Field**

GREEN SPACE

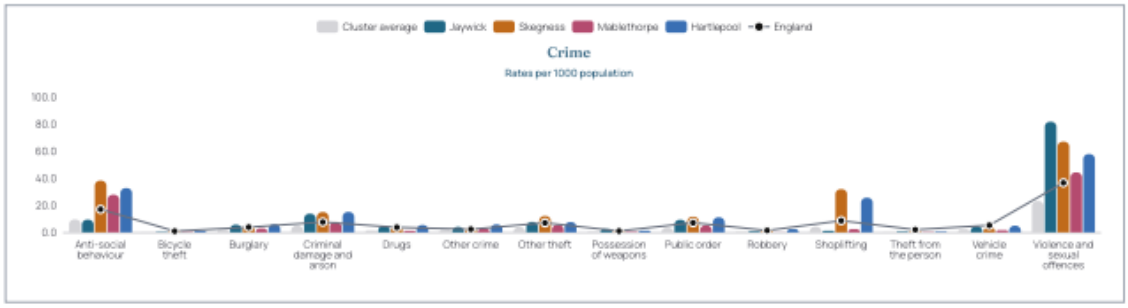
Parks, playing fields and woodland

Green space & woodland (sqkm)	Number of public parks	Number of play spaces	Number of sports fields / facilities
0.7	2	3	6
*More than similar places	*Less than similar places	*Same as similar places	*More than similar places

Sk	1.4	Sk	4	Sk	12	Sk	15
Ma	0.2	Ma	4	Ma	8	Ma	6
Ha	3.4	Ha	24	Ha	27	Ha	53

* per head of population

- **Crime**



Total number of crimes	Number street crimes
745	497
*More than similar places	*More than similar places

Sk	4,205	Sk	3,007
Ma	785	Ma	579
Ha	15,835	Ha	10,890

* per head of population

4. Moving Beyond Diagnosis to Regeneration

Data alone cannot fix a town, but accurate profiles lead to smarter investments. When policymakers understand why a town was left behind—whether due to lost transport connections, lost heritage identity, or missing social spaces—they can design targeted, long-term interventions.

Portals that democratise town-level data ensure regeneration is guided directly by the history, needs, and voices of local residents. Understanding English Places offers a single source of facts across 3,463 English towns and cities—a passion project self-funded by its co-creators. **Get in touch to find out more.**

> *"The greatest legacy any government could give its citizens is the ability to access independent data and insights in order that they can work together to create community cohesion and economic growth. Understanding English Places is the starting point to empower England's towns. The data exists. The model is proven. It is time to provide the decision-makers in our towns and cities with the tools they deserve."*
> **— MATTHEW HOPKINSON, CO-CREATOR OF UEP, CO-FOUNDER OF DIDOBI & HONORARY PROFESSOR OF PRACTICE AT UCL**

THINK YOU KNOW YOUR TOWN? THINK AGAIN.

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Get in touch for a preview of UEP or to explore your town and its peers:

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