

Connection and Legacy

Intro

Connection and legacy...

The re-instatement of the former Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line – now under the nomenclature of **The Northumberland Line** - is a 'compact' project stretching just 18.4 miles. Nevertheless, it has monumental implications. It offers many talking points to local people and visitors to the area alike.

Not only has it brought with it a practical alternative to congestion down the A189 in the daily commute, but also myriad opportunities for local communities. It's not just a construction project, it's intrinsically a matter of social justice in and of itself.

Sounds great doesn't it? But what does all this really mean? What is added (or social) value? What does community engagement for the Northumberland Line look like and who does it benefit?

Climb aboard for a journey through my 'take' on building social capital, public benefit, and community engagement.



Pictured above: The railway station at Blyth Circa 1950's.

What is social value? Connection and legacy...

The Public Service (Social Value) Act (2012) requires local authorities to consider how the services they commission and procure can improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.

The 2019 public consultation on 'how Government should take account of social value in the award of central Government contracts' saw huge support for more **outcomes-based** frameworks, as distinct from output-based metrics.

[Consultation Response Social Value in Government Procurement.docx \(live.com\)](#)

Put simply, Local Authorities with responsibility for procuring goods and services have a duty to ensure best value. But there is also an ethics dimension.

For those who work within the social agendas there has always been the recognition that public benefit and social value are discreet deliverables and should not become conflated with corporate social responsibility.

Also, that the policy should ensure fairness for the UK's small businesses, voluntary and community sector organisations and social enterprises.

Connection with those who are closest to our communities is vital because it is they who are well placed to deliver social value through the contract.

At Morgan Sindall Infrastructure (MSI) this is evidenced by the community engagement work and the partnerships forged with local supply chains, the VCSE sectors and the wider community. We capture this through both qualitative *and* quantitative means.

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De-veg Connection and legacy...

Early in 2022 the first part of the works was all about the clearing of vegetation. This would give the plant machinery a way in to start the preparatory 'access' works for the main construction.



James Jameson from sub-contractor, Ground Control assessing possible support for Josephine Butler Campus of schools in Ashington, Northumberland.

Visits to various schools helped our contractors learn about the types of students they serve and the potential to **add value** to the outdoor spaces.

James was keen to find ways to **re-use** (divert) left over materials from the de-vegetation activities happening on the station locations to help the schools.

Amongst the waste materials produced was many tonnes of wood chips, logs and the occasional tyre.

The schools in the area were extremely excited to receive these items, which not only saved them money, but became the subject for many subsequent projects.



A pupil from The Dales School for children with special educational needs spent the afternoon helping to distribute the wood chips.

Five schools along the rail corridor benefitted from the additional resources. The teams from Ground Control, Morgan Sindall and other local supply chain contractors worked together to ensure all logistics were **expertly** carried out.

Cooperation of this nature builds **social capital** by blurring the lines between large and small to medium commercial companies and local people.

The Team day with NCC and partners enhanced pathways, added definition to areas that looked in need of some TLC, gave spaces a 'facelift' and most of all built **positive relationships**.

"Thank you so much for all the work you all did. Honestly, it has been amazing, members of staff have commented how beautiful the garden is looking and that they can now see the children, instead of searching through the dense forest!"

***Ground Control** amazed us all and have made such a difference to the trees... From Sally and James at The Dales."*



Nick, Derrek & Graham from MSI & Ground Control with Andrew from Seaton Sluice School. Satisfied faces all round after a successful 'drop off' of chippings.

When asked for their opinion about the work carried out for them, the schools told us how **impressed** they all were. The perception held about 'big business' is often that there is little heart or humanity.

This perception dissolved very quickly when both MSI and supply chain personnel from Ground Control went the extra mile to help the schools with environmental enhancements. The teams felt they'd done **something special** too!

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Building Social Capital? Connection and legacy...

Environmental enhancements are often a superb way to 'push at an open door'. Communities sometimes require a small piece of input to make **things 'feel' better**.

Once this happens, **morale** is boosted, momentum starts, and local people join the conversation as activities provide a 'way in'.

Good examples are set and positive **role models** are seen by passers-by.

The **connections** made through the work in the school has piqued the interest of local young people.

The idea has now evolved into the establishment of a '**friends of**' – scheme to continue the maintenance of some of the school outdoor classrooms.

It is precisely this kind of **intended outcome** that builds social capital.

The four pillars of social capital being of course:

- *a civic network,*
- *norms of reciprocity,*
- *institutional trust,*
- *stranger trust.*



The importance of timely interventions can't be understated either. Taking as an example the **Bedlington investigations**.

Local people had commented that they believed an ancient wagon way existed long before the railway was established in the 1800s. The problem was that a key piece of evidence was **hidden**.

Below: An area where a tunnel was thought to link the wagon way to the water of the Blyth river for the exportation of coal.



Right and below: Staff teams from MSI, Ground Control and Northumberland County Council come together for a 'team' day in Northumberland.



Much to the **delight** of local people, MSI sub-contractor, Ground Control cleared the area in preparation for scrapings to be taken and analysed by the archaeological teams.

Below: The 'after' picture of the Bedlington Tunnel cleared by Ground Control



The next stage is to test the walls and ceiling of the tunnel for the existence of coal dust.

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Above: Before and after pictures of the clearing work by Ground Control at Seaton Sluice Middle school's outdoor teaching space. Previously under used, due to inaccessibility...!

What's next for environmental enhancements? Connection and legacy...

For now, the main part of the de-veg works has been completed.

Great relationships have started and later in the year reinstatement work offers opportunities for further development.

One such space will be the external garden areas of **Sleekburn House** – lineside neighbours of Bedlington station.

*Many of the residents grew up playing on the **steam trains** that brought the coal through South East Northumberland.*

They share fond memories of those days and are excited at the prospect of a **well-connected** railway.



Above L-R: Ray and Colin former head gardeners from Northumberland Landmarks and residents of Sleekburn House.

The opportunity to become involved in the **reinstatement** works at Sleekburn has been on many tenant's minds. This is something we'll look forward to working with our environmental partners on later in the year.



Above: The courtyard at Sleekburn House suggests a potential project.

How do you catch a wave upon the sand? Connection and legacy...

All these activities can at times seem somewhat **nebulous**. So just how *does* one account for and quantify this?

Well, one of the simple ways is to total up the many hours of staff time, from which a '**pounds and pence**' equivalent is then derived.

Many organisations and companies use their own methods. The industry standard however, is the **TOMs** framework. (Themes, Outcomes, Measures.)

The National TOMs Framework started as a solution for the **Social Value Act**, and has evolved into a social value measurement standard across the UK. Its **flexible, yet robust** structure allows it to be adapted to meet people's needs.

To maximise impact, financial 'proxy values' have been developed to help organisations **measure** the value delivered and quantify the wider value created for society.

Once true social value work is **embedded and understood** in a company, the prevailing view often moves from: "Can we afford to do all this stuff for communities?" To, "**As a responsible business, can we afford not to?**"

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